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TWELVE ONE-ACT PLAYS

With an Introduction by
WALTER PRICHARD EATON

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.
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INTRODUCTION

The time is passing when a group of amateurs, wishing to produce a play, select it from a catalogue, sight unseen, according to the number of characters in the cast, male and female (preferably 7 f., 1 m.), and according to the listed type, as comedy, farce, comedy-drama, and so on — terms too often largely without meaning. Most amateurs nowadays wish first to read the play they propose to act, to read several plays, in fact, before making a choice. In such reading, of course, conducted always with the practical demands of the stage in mind, there is no little dramatic training, as well as a peculiar kind of pleasure, a pleasure the reading of short stories and novels cannot supply. Possibly it comes from the fact that in reading the play you translate it into terms of yourself and your friends! But, whatever the reason, there is this peculiar pleasure as well as an increased understanding of the stage, to be found in the reading of plays, and hence any collection of plays available for amateurs, combining in one book several diverse works from which selection can be made, is on several counts a useful and desirable thing — that is, providing the plays are worth acting.

Just what makes a play worth acting? Different people would give different answers, no doubt, according to their standards of taste, their degree of sophistication, their seriousness of artistic purpose. But there is one quality any play, for any audience, must have if it is to be worth the trouble of committing it to memory and pre-

senting it on a stage; that quality is theatrical effectiveness. A play may lack every element of literary charm, it may even lack most elements of truth to life, and still be theatrically effective. It may, on the other hand, be a work of great literary distinction and probing reality. One thing is certain, however, no amount of literary distinction will save it, *on the stage*, if it lacks the element of "theatre," and its production by well-meaning amateurs will accomplish little more than gently boring an amiable audience. Theatrical effectiveness, too, is a relative thing; it may be potential in a work, but lie beyond the powers of certain performers to realize. "Riders to the Sea," "Aria da Capo," "The Maker of Dreams," to mention three one-act classics of the new amateur theatre, can be theatrically effective; but we all know to our sorrow that sometimes they aren't! Often they are beyond the powers of the actors and director attempting to put them on the stage. In the age of theatrical innocence (which, to be sure, has not yet passed in many sections of the land) amateurs used to present the most atrocious of plays, generally "rural comedies," which not only lacked all literary charm and all sense of life, but which actually lacked any sense of dramatic structure and progression. Yet they were theatrically effective, up to a certain point, simply because they gave the individual performers opportunities for speech and gesture, for impersonation, which were within their limited powers. Far be it from me to advocate that amateurs aim low, in order to hit something; but the average audience, which never considers the aim but only the accomplishment, does unquestionably desire to see the target punctured. Perhaps the thing is to find some middle ground between the play which is beyond the amateurs' powers and the one which is beneath their contempt.

Most of the plays in the present collection seem to me to occupy this middle ground. They possess undoubted theatrical values; they will act, they are, indeed, designed for the stage, not the study. These theatrical values, too, can be realized in production by any group of moderate skill, with competent direction. Neither players nor director need be of exceptional talent. On the other hand, nearly every play has some value of structure, of idea, or of emotional appeal, which lifts it out of the ruck where our amateur plays used to flounder, and gives it merit in the eyes of intelligent audiences. "The Romance of the Willow Pattern," for example, obvious as is its debt to "The Yellow Jacket," stands on its own feet as a story, has a quaint flavor of smiling romance, and gives both to the director and to the players (especially the girl) constant opportunity. The director can play with the audience in a hundred ways, whether it be in the comic manipulation of the "invisible" property man or the appeal to the imagination by the clever use of the bare stage. The girl can exert all her charm, her humor, her "personality," without having to strain for an impersonation beyond her powers.

Of "The Valiant" little needs to be said, for it has proved its effectiveness on numerous amateur stages. Mr. Middlemass, one of the authors, is himself an actor, as well as a former pupil of Prof. Baker, and this play is an admirable example of the new technical proficiency combined with serious purpose, characteristic of the present-day amateur theatre.

The little comedy, "God Winks," is again excellent practice for amateurs because it gives so much opportunity for character impersonation. The old man and Jane, his housekeeper, are picturesque, "sympathetic"

and believable. The daughter-in-law is " unsympathetic " and not too believable. She presents, perhaps, the harder problem because the actress must soften her outline, give her credibility, and yet carry the story. The director, too, has interesting problems, especially in so placing and manipulating the teacups that these inanimate objects will take their true place in the drama. Unless the old man's sentiment for this china is made convincing and contagious, of course, the play loses all point. But if it is too obtrusively driven home, it will not be contagious but artificial. On such nice balance success in the theatre often depends, which is one of the eternal fascinations of play production.

" The Most Foolish Virgin " is of course primarily designed for schools and churches, and save in the lighting presents no difficulties. In recent years there has arisen a considerable demand for plays adapted to church use, and considerable difficulty in meeting it. Possibly the gap between church and stage has widened too far to be bridged in a moment. But this symbolic sketch is coherent and straightforward, reaching a simple but rather touching climax. Properly lighted, and with care not to drag the pace, it should be effective both to the eye and the heart.

" Copy " is one of three plays in this collection which have been used in the professional theatre. It was not only produced professionally, but in vaudeville, where immediate effectiveness and rapid pace is a prime essential. It is an excellent illustration of the extreme compression the stage sometimes compels. Here, in the brief compass of a vaudeville sketch, events happen in a newspaper office that actually would be spread over several hours. In all such cases, it is the task of the director and the

actors to make the audience accept this convention of compression, so to rouse the emotions that the perhaps petty realisms of time and place are forgotten. Here again is one of the things which make theatrical production so interesting. In this particular play, there are, it seems to me, two threads of interest to emphasize — one, the vicious but only too well justified satire on the methods of our yellow journals and of those abominations of the present age, the tabloid newspapers, and second, the devotion of the editor to his job, though his personal happiness be crashing about his ears. There is something splendid about a real newspaper man's devotion to his job, and here it is touched with a pathetic and paradoxical irony, because the job is so unworthy. From a literary standpoint, perhaps one of the weaker plays of the collection, "Copy" for stage purposes holds very considerable possibilities both for the leading actor and for the director, and may conceivably be made to rouse not only excitement but thought.

In swinging away from the trash which used to be produced, our amateurs have not infrequently gone beyond their depth histrionically, and also have sought out plays which possess literary appeal but are too far removed from the current theatrical idiom. Occasionally, I think, amateurs should go beyond their depth, and should experiment with all sorts of dramas, from Checkov to O'Neill. That way progress lies. But they must also not forget that the theatre demands an audience as well as actors and play, and that an audience can go ahead just about so fast, and must base every step on the step below. It will not do to kick away the ladder, to blow up the stairway of past traditions and understandings. And it is because the plays in this collection

are not beyond the depth of the average amateur, and because they are written in the comprehensible idiom of the popular theatre, that they seem to me destined to fulfil a worthy purpose, which is to establish the amateur theatre on a sound basis with its potential public.

W. P. E.

Twin Fires,
Sheffield, Massachusetts

THE VALIANT

BY

HOLWORTHY HALL

AND

ROBERT MIDDLEMASS

CHARACTERS

Warden Holt
Father Daly
Dan, a jailer
James Dyke
Wilson, an attendant
Josephine Paris

Scene: The Warden's office in the State's Prison at Wethersfield, Connecticut.

Time: The present.

THE VALIANT

The curtain rises upon the Warden's office in the State's Prison at Wethersfield, Connecticut. It is a large, cold, unfriendly apartment, with bare floors and staring, whitewashed walls; it is furnished only with the Warden's flat-topped desk, and swivel-chair, with a few straight-backed chairs, one beside the desk and others against the walls, with a water-cooler and an eight-day clock. On the Warden's desk is a telephone instrument, a row of electric push-buttons, and a bundle of forty or fifty letters. At the back of the room are two large windows, crossed with heavy bars; at the left there is a door to an anteroom, and at the right there are two doors, of which the more distant leads to the office of the deputy warden, and the nearer is seldom used.

Warden Holt, dressed in a dark brown sack suit, with a negligee shirt and black string-tie, carelessly knotted in a bow, is seated at his desk, reflectively smoking a long, thin cigar. He is verging toward sixty, and his responsibilities have printed themselves in italics upon his countenance. His brown hair, and bushy eyebrows are heavily shot with gray; there is a deep parenthesis of wrinkles at the corners of his mouth and innumerable fine lines about his eyes. His bearing indicates that he is accustomed to rank as a despot,

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and yet his expression is far from that of an unreasoning tyrant. He is no sentimentalist, but he believes that in each of us there is a constant oscillation of good and evil; and that all evil should justly be punished in this world, and that all good should generously be rewarded — in the next.

Behind the Warden, the prison chaplain stands at one of the barred windows, gazing steadily out into the night. Father Daly is a slender, white-haired priest of somewhat more than middle age; he is dressed in slightly shabby clericals. His face is calm, intellectual and inspiring; but just at this moment, it gives evidence of a peculiar depression.

The Warden blows a cloud of smoke to the ceiling, inspects the cigar critically, drums on the desk, and finally peers over his shoulder at the chaplain. He clears his throat and speaks brusquely.

THE WARDEN. Has it started to rain?

FATHER DALY (*answers without turning*). Yes, it has.

THE WARDEN (*glaring at his cigar and impatiently tossing it aside*). It *would* rain to-night. (*His tone is vaguely resentful, as though the weather had added a needless fraction to his impatience.*)

FATHER DALY (*glances at a big silver watch*). It's past eleven o'clock. (*He draws a deep breath and comes slowly to the centre of the room.*) We haven't much longer to wait.

THE WARDEN. No, thank God! (*He gets up, and goes to the water-cooler: with the glass half-way to his lips he pauses.*) Was he quiet when you left him?

FATHER DALY (*a trifle abstracted*). Yes; yes, he was

perfectly calm and I believe he'll stay so to the very end.

THE WARDEN (*finishes his drink, comes back to his desk, and lights a fresh cigar*). You've got to hand it to him, Father; I never saw such nerve in all my life. It isn't bluff, and it isn't a trance, either, like some of 'em have — it's plain nerve. You've certainly got to hand it to him. (*He shakes his head in frank admiration.*)

FATHER DALY (*sorrowfully*). That's the pity of it — that a man with all his courage hasn't a better use for it. Even now, it's very difficult for me to reconcile his character, as I see it, with what we know he's done.

THE WARDEN (*continues to shake his head*). He's got my goat, all right.

FATHER DALY (*with a slight grimace*). Yes, and he's got mine, too.

THE WARDEN. When he sent for you to-night, I hoped he was going to talk.

FATHER DALY. He did talk, very freely.

THE WARDEN. What about?

FATHER DALY (*smiles faintly, and sits beside the desk*). Most everything.

THE WARDEN (*looks up quickly*). Himself?

FATHER DALY. No. That seems to be the only subject he isn't interested in.

THE WARDEN (*sits up to his desk, and leans upon it with both elbows*). He still won't give you any hint about who he really is?

only because I offer him companionship. Anybody else would do quite as well — and any other topic would suit him better.

THE WARDEN. Well, if he wants to face God as a heathen, *we* can't force him to change his mind.

FATHER DALY (*with gentle reproach*). No, but we can never give up trying to save his immortal soul. And his soul to-night seems as dark and foreboding to me as a haunted house would seem to the small boys down in Wethersfield. But I haven't given up hope.

THE WARDEN. No — you wouldn't.

FATHER DALY. Are you going to talk with him again yourself?

THE WARDEN (*opens a drawer of his desk, and brings out a large envelope*). I'll have to. I've still got some Liberty Bonds that belong to him. (*He gazes at the envelope, and smiles grimly.*) That was a funny thing — when the newspaper syndicate offered him twenty-five hundred for his autobiography, he jumped at it so quick I was sure he wanted the money for something or other. (*He slaps the envelope on the desk.*) But now the bonds are here, waiting for him, he won't say what to do with 'em. Know why? (*Father Daly shakes his head.*) Why, of course you do! Because the story he wrote was pure bunk from start to finish and the only reason he jumped at the chance of writing it was so's he could pull the wool over everybody's eyes a little farther. He don't want the bonds, but I've got to do *something* with 'em. (*He pushes a button on the desk.*) And besides, I want to make one more try at finding out who he is.

FATHER DALY. Shall I go with you to see him or do you want to see him alone?

THE WARDEN (*sits deliberating with one hand at his forehead, and the other hand tapping the desk*). Father, you gave me a thought — I believe I'm going to do something to-night that's never been done before in this prison — that is to say — not in all the twenty-eight years that *I've* been warden.

FATHER DALY. What's that?

THE WARDEN (*who has evidently come to an important decision, raps the desk more forcibly with his knuckles*). Instead of our going to see him, I'll have that boy brought into this office and let him sit here with you and me until the time comes for us all to walk through that door to the execution room.

FATHER DALY (*startled*). What on earth is your idea in doing a thing like that?

THE WARDEN. Because maybe if he sits here awhile with just you and me, and we go at him right, he'll loosen up and tell us about himself. It'll be different from being in his cell; it'll be sort of free and easy, and maybe he'll weaken. And then besides, if we take him to the scaffold through this passage-way, maybe I can keep the others quiet. If they don't know when the job's being done, they may behave 'emselves. I don't want any such yelling and screeching to-night as we had with that Greek. (*A jailer in blue uniform enters from the deputy's room and stands waiting.*) Dan, I want you to get Dyke and bring him to me here. (*The jailer stares blankly at him and the Warden's voice takes on an added note of authority.*) Get Dyke and bring him in here to me.

FATHER DALY. Not the slightest. He doesn't intend to either. He intends to die as a man of mystery to us. Sometimes I wonder if he isn't just as much of a mystery to himself.

THE WARDEN. Oh, he's trying to shield somebody, that's all. James Dyke isn't his right name — we know that; and we know all the rest of his story's a fake, too. Well, where's his motive? I'll tell you where it is; it's to keep his family and his friends, wherever they are, from knowing what's happened to him. Lots of 'em have the same idea, but I never knew one to carry it as far as this, before. You've certainly got to hand it to him. All we know is that we've got a man under sentence; and we don't know who he is, or where he comes from, or anything else about him, any more than we did four months ago.

FATHER DALY. It takes moral courage for a man to shut himself away from his family and his friends like that. They could have comforted him.

THE WARDEN. Not necessarily. What time is it?

FATHER DALY. Half-past eleven.

THE WARDEN (*rises and walks over to peer out of one of the barred windows*). I guess I'm getting too old for this sort of thing. A necktie party didn't use to bother me so much; but every time one comes along nowadays, I've got the blue devils beforehand and afterwards. And this one is just about the limit.

FATHER DALY. It certainly isn't a pleasant duty even with the worst of them.

THE WARDEN (*wheels back abruptly*). But what gets

me is why I should hate this one more than any of the others. The boy is guilty as hell.

FATHER DALY. Yes, he killed a man. "Wilfully, feloniously, and with malice aforethought."

THE WARDEN. And he pleaded guilty. So he deserves just what he's going to get.

FATHER DALY. That is the law. But has it ever occurred to you, Warden, that every now and then when a criminal behaves in a rather gentlemanly fashion to us, we instinctively think of him as just a little less of a criminal?

THE WARDEN. Yes, it has. But, all the same, this front of his makes me as nervous as the devil. He pleaded guilty, all right, but he don't *act* guilty. I feel just as if to-night I was going to do something every bit as criminal as he did. I can't help it. And when I get to feeling like that, why, I guess it's pretty nearly time I sent in my resignation.

FATHER DALY (*reflectively*). His whole attitude has been very remarkable. Why, only a few minutes ago I found myself comparing it with the fortitude that the Christian martyrs carried to their death, and yet —

THE WARDEN. He's no martyr!

FATHER DALY. I know it. And he's anything in the world but a Christian. That was just what I was going to say.

THE WARDEN. Has he got any religious streak in him at all?

FATHER DALY. I'm afraid he hasn't. He listens to me very attentively, but — (*He shrugs his shoulders.*) It's

THE JAILER. Yes, sir. (*He starts to obey the order but halts in the doorway and turns as the Warden speaks again. It is apparent that the Warden is a strict disciplinarian of the prison staff.*)

THE WARDEN. Oh, Dan!

THE JAILER. Yes, sir?

THE WARDEN. How nearly ready are they?

THE JAILER. They'll be all set in ten or fifteen minutes, sir. Twenty minutes at the outside.

THE WARDEN (*very sharp and magisterial*). Now, I don't want any delay or hitch in this thing to-night. If there is, somebody's going to get in awful Dutch with me. Pass that along.

THE JAILER. There won't be none, sir.

THE WARDEN. When everything's ready — not a second before — you let me know.

THE JAILER. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. I'll be right here with Dyke and Father Daly.

THE JAILER (*eyes widening*). Here?

THE WARDEN (*peremptorily*). Yes, here!

THE JAILER (*crushes down his astonishment*). Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. When everything and everybody is ready, you come from the execution room through the passage — (*he gestures toward the nearer door on the right*) open that door quietly and stand there.

THE JAILER. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. You don't have to say anything, and I don't *want* you to say anything. Just stand there. That all clear?

THE JAILER. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. That'll be the signal for us to start — understand?

THE JAILER. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN (*draws a deep breath*). All right. Now bring Dyke to me.

THE JAILER. Yes, sir. (*He goes out dazedly.*)

FATHER DALY. What about the witnesses and the reporters?

THE WARDEN. They're having their sandwiches and coffee now — the deputy'll have 'em seated in another ten or fifteen minutes. Let 'em wait. (*His voice becomes savage.*) I'd like to poison the lot of 'em. Reporters! Witnesses! (*The telephone bell rings.*) Hello — yes — yes — what's that? — Yes, yes, right here — who wants him? — (*to Father Daly*) Father, it's the Governor! (*His expression is tense.*)

FATHER DALY. (*His voice also gives evidence of incredulity and hope.*) What! (*He walks swiftly over to the desk.*) Is it about Dyke?

THE WARDEN. Ssh. (*He turns to the telephone.*) Yes, this is Warden Holt speaking. Hello — oh, hello Governor Fuller, how are you — oh, I'm between grass and hay, thanks — Well, this isn't my idea of a picnic, exactly — yes — yes — Oh, I should say in about half an hour or so — everything's just about ready. (*His expression gradually relaxes, and Father Daly, with*

a little sigh and shake of the head, turns away.) Oh, no, there won't be any slip-up — yes, we made the regular tests, one this afternoon and another at nine o'clock to-night — Oh, no, Governor, nothing can go wrong — Well, according to the law I've got to get it done as soon as possible after midnight, but you're the Governor of the state — How long? — Certainly, Governor, I can hold it off as long as you want me to — What say? — A *girl!* — You're going to send her to me? — you *have* sent her! — she ought to be here by this time? — All right, Governor, I'll ring you up when it's over. Good-by. (*He hangs up the receiver, mops his forehead with his handkerchief, and turns to Father Daly in great excitement.*) Did you get *that?* Some girl thinks Dyke's her long-lost brother, and she's persuaded the old man to let her come out here to-night — he wants me to hold up the job until she'd had a chance to see him. She's due here any minute, he says — in his own car — escorted by his own private secretary! Can you beat it?

Father Daly (*downcast*). Poor girl!

The Warden (*blots his forehead vigorously*). For a minute there I thought it was going to be a reprieve at the very least. Whew!

Father Daly. So did I.

(*The door from the deputy's room is opened, and Dyke comes in, immediately followed by the jailer. Dyke halts just inside the door and waits passively to be told what to do next. He has a lean, pale face, with a high forehead, good eyes, and a strong chin; his mouth is ruled in a firm straight line. His wavy hair is prematurely gray. His figure has the elasticity of youth, but he*

might pass among strangers either as a man of forty, or as a man of twenty-five, depending upon the mobility of his features at a given moment. He is dressed in a dark shirt open at the throat, dark trousers without belt or suspenders, and soft slippers. The jailer receives a nod from the Warden, and goes out promptly, closing the door behind him.)

THE WARDEN (*swings half-way around in his swivel-chair*). Sit down, Dyke. (*He points to the chair at the right of his desk.*)

DYKE. Thanks. (*He goes directly to the chair and sits down.*)

THE WARDEN (*leans back, and surveys him thoughtfully. Father Daly remains in the background*). Dyke, you've been here under my charge for nearly four months and I want to tell you that from first to last you've behaved yourself like a gentleman.

DYKE. (*His manner is vaguely cynical without being in the least impertinent.*) Why should I make you any trouble?

THE WARDEN. Well, you *haven't* made me any trouble, and I've tried to show what I think about it. I've made you every bit as comfortable as the law would let me.

DYKE. You've been very kind to me. (*He glances over his shoulder at the chaplain.*) And you, too, Father.

THE WARDEN. I've had you brought in here to stay from now on. (*Dyke looks inquiringly at him.*) No, you won't have to go back to your cell again. You're to stay right here with Father Daly and me.

DYKE (*carelessly*). All right.

THE WARDEN (*piqued by this cool reception of the distinguished favor*). You don't seem to understand that I'm doing something a long way out of the ordinary for you.

DYKE. Oh, yes, I do, but maybe *you* don't understand why it doesn't give me much of a thrill.

FATHER DALY (*comes forward*). My son, the Warden is only trying to do you one more kindness.

DYKE. I know he is, Father, but the Warden isn't taking very much of a gamble. From now on, one place is about the same as another.

THE WARDEN. What do you mean?

DYKE (*his voice is very faintly sarcastic*). Why, I mean that I'm just as much a condemned prisoner here as when I was in my cell. That door (*he points to it*) leads right *back* to my cell. Outside those windows are armed guards every few feet. You yourself can't get through the iron door in that anteroom (*he indicates the door to the left*) until somebody on the outside unlocks it; and I know as well as you do where that door (*he points to the nearer door on the right*) leads to.

THE WARDEN (*stiffly*). Would you rather wait in your cell?

DYKE. Oh, no, this is a little pleasanter. Except —

THE WARDEN. Except what?

DYKE. In my cell, I could smoke.

THE WARDEN (*shrugs his shoulders*). What do you want — cigar or cigarette?

DYKE. A cigarette, if it's all the same.

(*The Warden opens a drawer of his desk, takes out a box of cigarettes, removes one and hands it to Dyke. The Warden striking a match, lights Dyke's cigarette, and then carefully puts out the match.*)

DYKE (*smiles faintly*). Thanks. You're a good host.

THE WARDEN. Dyke, before it's too late I wish you'd think over what Father Daly and I've said to you so many times.

DYKE. I've thought of nothing else.

THE WARDEN. Then — as man to man — and this is your last chance — who are you?

DYKE (*inspects the cigarette*). Who am I? James Dyke — a murderer.

THE WARDEN. That isn't your real name and we know it.

DYKE. You're not going to execute a name — you're going to execute a *man*. What difference does it make whether you call me Dyke or something else?

THE WARDEN. You had another name once. What was it?

DYKE. If I had, I've forgotten it.

FATHER DALY. Your mind is made up, my son?

DYKE. Yes, Father. It is.

THE WARDEN. Dyke.

DYKE. Yes, sir?

THE WARDEN. Do you see this pile of letters? (*he places his hand over it*).

DYKE. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN (*fingers them*). Every one of these letters is about the same thing and all put together we've got maybe four thousand of 'em. These here are just a few samples.

DYKE. What about them?

THE WARDEN. We've had letters from every State in the Union and every province in Canada. We've had fifteen or twenty from England, four or five from France, two from Australia and one from Russia.

DYKE. Well?

THE WARDEN (*inclines toward him*). Do you know what every one of those letters says — what four thousand different people are writing to me about?

DYKE. No, sir.

THE WARDEN (*speaks slowly and impressively*). Who *are* you — and are you the missing son — or brother — or husband — or sweetheart?

DYKE (*flicks his cigarette ashes to the floor*). Have you answered them?

THE WARDEN. No, I couldn't. I want you to.

DYKE. How's that?

THE WARDEN. I want you to tell me who you are. (*Dyke shakes his head.*) Can't you see you *ought* to do it?

DYKE. No, sir, I can't exactly see that. Suppose you explain it to me.

THE WARDEN (*suddenly*). You're trying to shield somebody, aren't you?

DYKE. Yes — no, I'm not!

THE WARDEN (*glances at Father Daly and nods with elation*). Who is it? Your family?

DYKE. I said I'm not.

THE WARDEN. But first, you said you were.

DYKE. That was a slip of the tongue.

THE WARDEN (*has grown persuasive*). Dyke, just listen to me a minute. Don't be narrow, look at this thing in a big, broad way. Suppose you should tell me your real name, and I publish it, it'll bring an awful lot of sorrow, let's say, to *one* family, *one* home, and that's your own. That's probably what you're thinking about. Am I right? You want to spare your family and I don't blame you. On the surface, it sure would look like a mighty white thing for you to do. But look at it *this* way: suppose you came out with the truth, flat-footed, why, you might put all that sorrow into *one* home — your own — but at the same time you'd be putting a tremendous amount of relief into four thousand — others. Don't you get that? Don't you figure you owe something to all these other people?

DYKE. Not a thing.

FATHER DALY (*has been fidgeting*). My boy, the Warden is absolutely right. You do owe something to the other people — you owe them peace of mind — and for the sake of all those thousands of poor distressed women, who imagine God knows what, I beg of you to tell us who you are.

DYKE. Father, I simply can't do it.

FATHER DALY. Think carefully, my boy, think very carefully. We're not asking out of idle curiosity.

DYKE. I know that, but please don't let's talk about it any more. (*To the Warden.*) You can answer those letters whenever you want to, and you can say I'm not the man they're looking for. That'll be the truth, too. Because I haven't any mother — or father — or sister — or wife — or sweetheart. That's fair enough, isn't it?

FATHER DALY (*sighs wearily*). As you will, my son.

THE WARDEN. Dyke, there's one more thing.

DYKE. Yes?

THE WARDEN. Here are the Liberty Bonds (*he takes up the large envelope from his desk*) that belong to you. Twenty-five hundred dollars in real money.

DYKE (*removes the bonds and examines them*). Good-looking, aren't they?

THE WARDEN (*casually*). What do you want me to do with them?

DYKE. Well, I can't very well take them with me, so, under the circumstances, I'd like to put them where they'll do the most good.

THE WARDEN (*more casually yet*). Who do you want me to send 'em to?

DYKE (*laughs quietly*). Now, Warden Holt, you didn't think you were going to catch me that way, did you?

THE WARDEN (*scowls*). Who'll I send 'em to? I can't keep 'em here, and I can't destroy 'em. What do you want me to do with 'em?

DYKE (*ponders diligently and tosses the envelope to the desk*). I don't know. I'll think of something to do with them. I'll tell you in just a minute. Is there anything else?

THE WARDEN. Not unless you want to make some sort of statement.

DYKE. No, I guess I've said everything. I killed a man and I'm not sorry for it — that is, I'm not sorry I killed that particular person. I ——

FATHER DALY (*raises his hand*). Repentance ——

DYKE (*raises his own hand in turn*). I've heard that repentance, Father, is the sick bed of the soul — and mine is very well and flourishing. The man deserved to be killed; he wasn't fit to live. It was my duty to kill him, and I did it. I'd never struck a man in anger in all my life, but when I knew what that fellow had done, I knew I had to kill him, and I did it deliberately and intentionally — and carefully. I knew what I was doing, and I haven't any excuse — that is, I haven't any excuse that satisfies the law. Now, I learned pretty early in life that whatever you do in this world you have to pay for in one way or another. If you kill a man, the price you have to pay is this (*he makes a gesture which sweeps the entire room*) and that (*he points to the nearer door on the right*) and I'm going to pay it. That's all there is to that. And an hour from now while my body is lying in there, if a couple of angel policemen grab my soul and haul it up before God ——

FATHER DALY (*profoundly shocked*). My boy, my boy, please ——

DYKE. I beg your pardon, Father. I don't mean to trample on anything that's sacred to you, but what I do mean to say is this: If I've got to be judged by God Almighty for the crime of murder, I'm not afraid, because the other fellow will certainly be there, too, won't he? And when God hears the whole story and both sides of it, which *you* never heard and never will — and they never heard it in the court room, either — why, then, if he's any kind of a God at all, I'm willing to take my chances with the other fellow. That's how concerned I am about the hereafter. And, if it'll make you feel any better, Father, why I *do* rather think there's going to be a hereafter. I read a book once that said a milligram of musk will give out perfume for seven thousand years, and a milligram of radium will give out light for *seventy* thousand. Why shouldn't a soul — mine, for instance — live more than twenty-seven? But if there *isn't* any hereafter — if we just die and are dead and that's all — why, I'm still not sorry and I'm not afraid, because I'm quits with the other fellow — the law is quits with me, and it's all balanced on the books. And that's all there is to that. (*An attendant enters from the anteroom.*)

THE WARDEN. Well? What is it?

THE ATTENDANT. Visitor to see you, sir. With note from Governor Fuller. (*He presents it.*)

THE WARDEN (*barely glances at the envelope*). Oh! A young woman?

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. Is Mrs. Case there?

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. Have the girl searched, and then take her into the anteroom and wait till I call you.

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir. (*He goes out.*)

THE WARDEN. Dyke, a young woman has just come to see you — do you want to see her?

DYKE. I don't think so. What does she want?

THE WARDEN. She thinks maybe she's your sister, and she's come a thousand miles to find out.

DYKE. She's wrong. I haven't any sister.

THE WARDEN (*hesitates*). Will I tell her that, or do you want to tell it to her yourself?

DYKE. Oh, you tell her.

THE WARDEN. All right. (*He starts to rise but resumes his seat as Dyke speaks.*)

DYKE. Just a second — she's come a thousand miles to see me, did you say?

THE WARDEN. Yes, and she's got special permission from the Governor to talk to you — that is, with my O. K.

DYKE. A year ago, nobody'd have crossed the street to look at me, and now they come a thousand miles!

FATHER DALY. This is one of your debts to humanity, my boy. It wouldn't take you two minutes to see her, and, if you don't, after she's made that long journey in hope and dread and suffering —

DYKE. Where can I talk with her — here?

THE WARDEN. Yes.

DYKE. Alone? (*The Warden is doubtful.*) Why, you don't need to be afraid. I haven't the faintest idea who the girl is, but if she happens to be some poor misguided sentimental fool, with a gun or a pocket full of cyanide of potassium, she's wasting her time. I wouldn't cheat the sovereign state of Connecticut for anything in the world — not even to please a young lady.

THE WARDEN. Dyke, there's something about you that gets everybody.

DYKE. How about the jury?

THE WARDEN. You've got a sort of way with you —

DYKE. How about that spread-eagle district attorney?

THE WARDEN. I'm going to let you talk with that girl in here — alone.

DYKE. Thanks.

THE WARDEN. It's a sort of thing that's never been done before, but if I put you on your honor —

DYKE (*cynically*). My honor! Thank you, so much.

FATHER DALY. Warden, are you sure it's wise?

DYKE. Father, I'm disappointed in you. Do you imagine I'd do anything that could reflect on Warden Holt — or you — or the young lady — or *me?*

THE WARDEN. Father, will you take Dyke into the deputy's room? I want to speak to the young lady first.

FATHER DALY. Certainly. Come, my boy. (*Father Daly and Dyke start toward the deputy's room.*)

THE WARDEN. I'll call you in just a couple of minutes.

DYKE. We promise not to run away. (*They go out together.*)

THE WARDEN (*calls*). Wilson! (*The attendant enters from the left.*)

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir?

THE WARDEN. Is the girl there?

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. Frisked?

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. Everything all right?

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir.

THE WARDEN (*throws away his cigar*). Bring her in.

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir. (*He speaks through the door at the left.*) Step this way, Miss. This here's the Warden.

(*A young girl appears on the threshold, and casts about in mingled curiosity and apprehension. She is fresh and wholesome, and rather pretty; but her manner betrays a certain spiritual aloofness from the ultra-modern world — a certain delicate reticence of the flesh — which immediately separates her from the metropolitan class. Indeed, she is dressed far too simply for a metropolitan girl of her age; she wears a blue tailored suit with deep white cuffs and a starched white sailor-collar, and a*

small blue hat which fits snugly over her fluffy hair. Her costume is not quite conservative enough to be literally old-fashioned, but it hints at the taste and repression of an old-fashioned home.
She is neither timid nor aggressive; she is self-unconscious. She looks at the warden squarely, but not in boldness, and yet not in feminine appeal; she has rather the fearlessness of a girl who has lost none of her illusions about men in general. Her expression is essentially serious; it conveys, however, the idea that her seriousness is due to her present mission, and that ordinarily she takes an active joy in the mere pleasure of existence.)

THE WARDEN (*he had expected a very different type of visitor so that he is somewhat taken aback.*) All right, Wilson.

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir. (*He goes out.*)

THE WARDEN (*with grave deference, half rises*). Will you sit down?

THE GIRL. Why — thank you very much. (*She sits in the chair beside his desk and regards him trustfully.*)

THE WARDEN (*he is palpably affected by her youth and innocence, and he is not quite sure how best to proceed, but eventually he makes an awkward beginning.*) You've had an interview with the Governor, I understand?

THE GIRL. Yes, sir. I was with him almost an hour.

THE WARDEN. And you want to see Dyke, do you?

THE GIRL. Yes, sir. I *hope* I'm not — too late.

THE WARDEN. No, you're not too late. (*He is appraising her carefully.*) But I want to ask you a few questions

beforehand. (*Her reaction of uncertainty induces him to soften his tone.*) There isn't anything to get upset about. I just want to make it easier for you, not harder. Where do you live?

THE GIRL. In Ohio.

THE WARDEN (*very kindly*). What place?

THE GIRL. In Pennington, sir. It's a little town not far from Columbus.

THE WARDEN. And you live out there with your father and mother?

THE GIRL. No, sir — just my mother and I. My father died when I was a little baby.

THE WARDEN. Why didn't your mother come here herself, instead of sending you?

THE GIRL. She couldn't. She's sick.

THE WARDEN. I see. Have you any brothers or sisters?

THE GIRL (*slightly more at ease*). Just one brother, sir — this one. He and I were the only children. We were very fond of each other.

THE WARDEN. He was considerably older than you?

THE GIRL. Oh, yes. He's ten years older.

THE WARDEN. Why did he leave home?

THE GIRL. I don't really know, sir, except he just wanted to be in the city. Pennington's pretty small.

THE WARDEN. How long is it since you've seen him?

THE GIRL. It's eight years.

THE WARDEN (*his voice is almost paternal*). As long as that? Hm! And how old are you now?

THE GIRL. I'm almost eighteen.

THE WARDEN (*repeats slowly*). Almost eighteen. Hm! And are you sure after all this time you'd recognize your brother if you saw him?

THE GIRL. Well — (*She looks down, as if embarrassed to make the admission.*) Of course I — *think* so, but maybe I couldn't. You see, I was only a little girl when he went away — he wasn't a bad boy, sir, I don't think he ever could be really bad — but if this *is* my brother, why he's been in a great deal of trouble and you know that trouble makes people look different.

THE WARDEN. Yes, it does. But what is it makes you think this man Dyke may be your brother — and why didn't you think of it sooner? The case has been in the papers for the last six months.

THE GIRL. Why, it wasn't until last Tuesday that mother saw a piece in the *Journal* — that's the Columbus paper — that he'd written all about himself, and there was one little part of it that sounded so like Joe — like the funny way he used to say things — and then there was a picture that looked the least little *bit* like him — well, mother just wanted me to come East and find out for sure.

THE WARDEN. It's too bad she couldn't come herself. She'd probably know him whether he'd changed or not.

THE GIRL. Yes, sir. But I'll do the best I can.

THE WARDEN. When was the last time you heard from him, and where was he, and what was he doing?

THE GIRL. Why, it's about five or six years since we had a letter from Joe. He was in Seattle, Washington.

THE WARDEN. What doing?

THE GIRL. I don't remember. At home, though, he worked in the stationery store. He liked books.

THE WARDEN (*suspiciously*). Why do you suppose he didn't write home?

THE GIRL. I — couldn't say. He was just — thoughtless.

THE WARDEN. Wasn't in trouble of any kind?

THE GIRL. Oh, *no!* Never. That is — unless he's — here now.

THE WARDEN (*deliberates*). How are you going to tell him?

THE GIRL. I don't know what you mean.

THE WARDEN. Why, you say maybe you wouldn't know him even if you saw him — and I'll guarantee this man Dyke won't help you out very much. How do you think you're going to tell? Suppose he don't want to be recognized by you or anybody else? Suppose he's so ashamed of himself he —

THE GIRL. I'd thought of that. I'm just going to talk to him — ask him questions — about things he and I used to do together — I'll watch his face, and if he's my brother, I'm sure I can tell.

THE WARDEN (*with tolerant doubt*). What did you and your brother ever use to do that would help you out now?

THE GIRL. He used to play games with me when I was a little girl, and tell me stories — that's what I'm counting on mostly — the stories.

THE WARDEN. I'm afraid.

THE GIRL. Especially Shakespeare stories.

THE WARDEN. Shakespeare!

THE GIRL. Why, yes. He used to get the plots of the plays — all the Shakespeare plays — out of a book by a man named Lamb, and then he'd tell me the stories in his own words. It was wonderful!

THE WARDEN. I'm certainly afraid he —

THE GIRL. But best of all he'd learn some of the speeches from the plays themselves. He liked to do it — he was sure he was going to be an actor or something — he was in all the high school plays, always. And then he'd teach some of the speeches to me, and we'd say them to each other. And one thing — every night he'd sit side of my bed, and when I got sleepy there were two speeches we'd always say to each other, like good-night — two speeches out of "Romeo and Juliet," and then I'd go to sleep. I can see it all. (*The Warden shakes his head.*) Why do you do that?

THE WARDEN. This boy isn't your brother?

THE GIRL. Do you think he isn't?

THE WARDEN. I *know* he isn't.

THE GIRL. How do you?

THE WARDEN. This boy never heard of Shakespeare — much less learned him. (*He presses a button on his desk.*) Oh, I'll let you see him for yourself, only you

might as well be prepared. (*The attendant enters from the anteroom.*) Tell Dyke and Father Daly to come in here — they're in the deputy's room.

THE ATTENDANT. Yes, sir. (*He crosses behind the Warden, and goes off to the right.*)

THE WARDEN. If he turns out to be your brother — which he won't — you can have, say, an hour with him. If he don't, you'll oblige me by cutting it as short as you can.

THE GIRL. You see, I've got to tell mother something perfectly definite. She's worried so long about him, and — and *now* the suspense is perfectly terrible for her.

THE WARDEN. I can understand that. You're a plucky girl.

THE GIRL. Of course, it would be awful for us if this *is* Joe, but even that would be better for mother than just to stay awake nights, and wonder and wonder, and never *know* what became of him. (*The attendant opens the door of the deputy's room, and when Dyke and Father Daly have come in, he crosses again behind the Warden, and is going out at the left when the Warden signs to him and he stops.*)

THE WARDEN (*gets to his feet*). Dyke, this is the young lady that's come all the way from Pennington, Ohio, to see you.

DYKE (*who has been talking in an undertone to Father Daly, raises his head quickly*). Yes, sir?

THE WARDEN. I've decided you can talk with her here — alone. (*The girl has risen, breathless, and stands fixed; Dyke inspects her coldly from head to foot.*)

DYKE. Thank you. It won't take long.

THE WARDEN (*has been scanning the girl's expression; now, as he sees that she has neither recognized Dyke nor failed to recognize him, he makes a little grimace in confirmation of his own judgment*). Father Daly and I'll stay in the deputy's office. We'll leave the door open. Wilson, you stand in the anteroom with the door open.

DYKE (*bitterly*). My honor!

THE WARDEN. What say?

DYKE. I didn't say anything.

THE WARDEN (*to the girl*). Will you please remember what I told you about the time?

THE GIRL. Oh, yes, sir.

THE WARDEN. Come, Father. (*They go off into the deputy's room, and the attendant, at a nod from the Warden, goes off at the left.*)

(*Dyke and the girl are now facing each other; Dyke is well-poised and insouciant, and gives the impression of complete indifference to the moment. The girl, on the other hand, is deeply agitated and her agitation is gradually increased by Dyke's own attitude.*)

THE GIRL (*after several efforts to speak*). Mother sent me to see you.

DYKE (*politely callous*). Yes?

THE GIRL (*compelled to drop her eyes*). You see, we haven't seen or heard of my brother Joe for ever so long, and mother thought — after what we read in papers ——

DYKE. That I might be your brother Joe?

THE GIRL (*obviously relieved*). Yes, that's it.

DYKE. Well, you can easily see that I'm not your brother, can't you?

THE GIRL (*stares at him again*). I'm not sure. You look a little like him, just as the picture in the paper did, but then again, it's so long — (*she shakes her head dubiously*) and I'd thought of Joe so differently —

DYKE (*his manner is somewhat indulgent, as though to a child*). As a matter of fact, I couldn't be *your* brother or anybody else's brother, because I never had a sister. So that rather settles it.

THE GIRL. Honestly?

DYKE. Honestly.

THE GIRL (*unconvinced, becomes more appealing*). What's your real name?

DYKE. Dyke — James Dyke.

THE GIRL. That's sure enough your name?

DYKE. Sure enough. You don't think I'd tell a lie at this stage of the game, do you?

THE GIRL (*musing*). No, I don't believe you would. Where do you come from — I mean where were you born?

DYKE. In Canada, but I've lived all over.

THE GIRL. Didn't you ever live in Ohio?

DYKE. No. Never.

THE GIRL. What kind of work did you do — what was your business?

DYKE. Oh, I'm sort of Jack-of-all-trades. I've been everything a man *could* be — except a success.

THE GIRL. Do you like books?

DYKE. Books?

THE GIRL. Yes — books to read.

DYKE. I don't read when there's anything better to do. I've read a lot here.

THE GIRL. Did you ever sell books — for a living, I mean?

DYKE. Oh, no.

THE GIRL (*growing confused*). I hope you don't mind my asking so many questions. But I —

DYKE. No — go ahead, if it'll relieve your mind any.

THE GIRL. You went to school somewhere, of course — high school?

DYKE. No, I never got that far.

THE GIRL. Did you ever want to be an actor? Or *were* you ever?

DYKE. No, just a convict.

THE GIRL (*helplessly*). Do you know any poetry?

DYKE. Not to speak of.

THE GIRL (*delays a moment, and then, watching him very earnestly, she recites just above her breath*).

"Thou knowst the mask of night is on my face
Else would a maiden blush bepaint my cheek
For that which —"

(*Realizing that Dyke's expression is one of utter vacuity she falters, and breaks off the quotation, but she continues to watch him unwaveringly.*) Don't you know what that is?

DYKE. No, but to tell the truth, it sounds sort of silly to *me*. Doesn't it to you?

THE GIRL (*her intonation has become slightly forlorn, but she gathers courage, and puts him to one more test*).

"Good-night, good-night, parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good-night till it be morrow."

DYKE (*his mouth twitches in amusement*). Eh?

THE GIRL. What comes next?

DYKE. Good Lord, *I* don't know.

THE GIRL (*gazes intently, almost imploringly, at him as though she is making a struggle to read his mind. Then she relaxes and holds out her hand*). Good-by. You — you're *not* Joe, are you? I — had to come and find out, though. I hope I've not made you too unhappy.

DYKE (*ignores her hand*). You're not going now?

THE GIRL (*spiritless*). Yes. I promised the — he is the Warden? that man in there? — I said I'd go right away if you weren't my brother. And you aren't, so —

DYKE. You're going back to your mother?

THE GIRL. Yes.

DYKE. I'm surprised that she sent a girl like you on a sorry errand like this, instead of —

THE GIRL. She's very sick.

DYKE. Oh, that's too bad.

THE GIRL (*twisting her handkerchief*). No, she's not well at all. And most of it's from worrying about Joe.

DYKE. Still, when you tell her that her son isn't a murderer — at least, that he isn't *this* one — that'll comfort her a good deal, won't it?

THE GIRL (*reluctantly*). Yes, I think maybe it will only —

DYKE. Only what?

THE GIRL. I don't think mother'll ever be *really* well again until she finds out for certain where Joe is and what's become of him.

DYKE (*shakes his head compassionately*). Mothers ought not to be treated like that. I wish I'd treated *mine* better. By the way, you didn't tell me what your name is.

THE GIRL. Josephine Paris.

DYKE (*is suddenly attentive*). Paris? That's an unusual name. I've heard it somewhere, too.

THE GIRL. Just like the name of the city — in France.

DYKE (*knitting his brows*). And your brother's name was Joseph?

THE GIRL. Yes — they used to call us Joe and Josie — that's funny, isn't it?

DYKE (*thoughtfully*). No, I don't think it's so very funny. I rather like it. (*He passes his hand over his forehead as if trying to coerce his memory.*)

THE GIRL. What's the matter?

DYKE (*frowning*). I was thinking of something — now, what on earth was that boy's name! Wait a minute, don't tell me — wait a minute — I've got it! (*He punctuates his triumph with one fist in the palm of the other hand.*) Joseph Anthony Paris!

THE GIRL (*amazed*). Why, that's his name! That's Joe! How did you ever —

DYKE (*his manner is very forcible and convincing*). Wait! Now listen carefully to what I say, and don't interrupt me, because we've only got a minute, and I want you to get this all straight, so you can tell your mother. When the war came along I enlisted and I was overseas for four years — with the Canadians. Early one morning we'd staged a big trench raid, and there was an officer who'd been wounded coming back, and was lying out there in a shell-hole under fire. The Jerries were getting ready for a raid of their own, so they were putting down a box barrage with light guns and howitzers and a few heavies. This officer was lying right in the middle of it. Well, all of a sudden a young fellow dashed out of a trench not far from where I was, and went for that officer. He had to go through a curtain of shells and, more than that, they opened on him with rifles and machine guns. The chances were just about a million to one against him, and he must have known it, but he went out just the same. He got the officer in his arms and started back, but he'd only gone a few yards when a five point nine landed right on top of the two of them. After-

ward, we got what was left — the identification tag was still there — and that was the name — Joseph Anthony Paris!

THE GIRL (*carries both hands to her breast*). Oh!

DYKE. If that was your brother's name, then you can tell your mother that he died like a brave man and a soldier, three years ago, in France.

THE GIRL. Joe — my brother Joe — is dead?

DYKE. On the field of battle. It was one of the wonderful, heroic things that went almost unnoticed, as so many of them did. If an officer had seen it, there'd have been a decoration for your mother to keep and remember him by.

THE GIRL. And you were there — and saw it?

DYKE. I was there and saw it. It was three years ago. That's why you and your mother haven't heard from him. And if you don't believe what I've said, why, you just write up to Ottawa and get the official record. Of course (*he shrugs his shoulders contemptuously*) those records are in terribly poor shape, but at least they can tell you what battalion he fought with, when he went overseas. Only you mustn't be surprised no matter whether they say he was killed in action, or died of wounds, or is missing, or even went through the whole war with his outfit, and was honorably discharged. They really don't know what happened to half the men. But I've told you the truth. And it certainly ought to make your mother happy when she knows that her boy died as a soldier, and not as a criminal.

THE GIRL (*is transfigured*). Yes, yes, it will!

DYKE. And does it make you happy, too?

THE GIRL (*nods repeatedly*). Yes. So happy — after what we were both afraid of — I can't even cry — yet. (*She brushes her eyes with her handkerchief.*) I can hardly wait to take it to her.

DYKE (*struck by a sudden inspiration*). I want to give you something else to take to her. (*He picks up from the desk the envelope containing the Liberty Bonds and seals it.*) I want you to give this to your mother from me. Tell her it's from a man who was at Vimy Ridge and saw your brother die, so it's sort of a memorial for him. (*He touches her arm as she absently begins to tear open the envelope.*) No, don't you open it — let *her* do it.

THE GIRL. What is it? Can't I know?

DYKE. Never mind now, but give it to her. It's all I've got in the world and it's too late now for me to do anything else with it. And have your mother buy a little gold star to wear for her son — and you get one, and wear it — here — (*he touches his heart.*) Will you?

THE GIRL. Yes — I will. And yet somehow I'll almost feel that I'm wearing it for you, too.

DYKE (*shakes his head soberly*). Oh, no! You mustn't ever do that. I'm not fit to be mentioned in the same breath with a boy like your brother. And now I'm afraid it *is* time for you to go. I'm sorry, but — you'd better. I'm glad you came before it was too late, though.

THE GIRL (*gives him her hand*). Good-by, and thank you. You've done more for me — and mother — than I could possibly tell you. And — and I'm so sorry for you — so *truly sorry* — I wish I could only do something to

make you a tiny bit happier too. *Is* there anything I could do?

DYKE (*stares at her and by degrees he becomes wistful*). Why — yes, there is. Only I — (*He leaves the sentence uncompleted.*)

THE GIRL. What is it?

DYKE (*looks away*). I can't tell you. I never should have let myself think of it.

THE GIRL. Please tell me. I want you to. For — for Joe's sake, tell me what I can do.

DYKE (*his voice is low and desolate*). Well — in all the months I've been in this hideous place, you're the first girl I've seen. I didn't ever expect to see one again. I'd forgotten how much like angels women look. I've been terribly lonesome and to-night, especially, and if you really do want to do something for me — for your brother's sake — you see, you're going to leave me in just a minute and — and I haven't any sister of my own, or anybody else, to say good-by to me — so, if you could — *really* say good-by — (*She gazes at him for a moment, understands, flushes, and then slowly moves into his outstretched arms. He holds her close to him, touches his lips to her forehead twice and then releases her.*)

DYKE (*thickly*). Good-by, my dear.

THE GIRL. Good-night. (*She endeavors to smile, but her voice catches in her throat.*) Good-by.

DYKE (*impulsively*). What is it?

THE GIRL (*shakes her head*). N-nothing.

DYKE. Nothing?

THE GIRL (*clutches her handkerchief tight in her palm*). I was thinking — I was thinking what I used to say to my brother — for good-night. (*She very nearly breaks down.*) If I *only* could have — have said it to him just once more — for good-by.

DYKE. What was it?

THE GIRL. I — I told it to you once, and you said it was silly.

DYKE (*softly*). Say it again.

THE GIRL (*she cannot quite control her voice*).

"Good-night, good-night, parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good-night till it be morrow."

(*She goes uncertainly toward the anteroom, hesitates, almost turns back, and then with a choking sob she hurries through the door and closes it behind her. For several seconds Dyke stands rigidly intent upon that door; until at length, without changing his attitude or his expression, he speaks very tenderly and reminiscently.*)

"Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast;
Would *I* were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest."

(*The Warden and Father Daly come in quietly from the deputy's room; and as they behold Dyke, how rapt and unconscious of them he is, they look at each other, questioningly. The Warden glances at the clock and makes as though to interrupt Dyke's solitary reflections but Father Daly quietly restrains him. The chaplain sits down in one of the chairs at the back wall; the Warden*

crosses on tiptoe and sits at his desk; he is excessively nervous and he continually refers to the clock. Dyke turns, as though unwillingly, from the door; there are depths in his eyes, and his thoughts are evidently far away. He sits in the chair to the right of the Warden's desk and leans outward, his right hand on his knee. He puts his left hand to his throat as though to protect it from a sudden pain. He gazes straight ahead into the unknown and speaks in revery.)

"Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;
Seeing that death, a necessary end,
Will come when it will come."

(*He stops and muses for a time, while the Warden glances perplexedly at Father Daly to discover if the priest can interpret what Dyke is saying. Father Daly shakes his head. Abruptly Dyke's face is illuminated by a new and welcome recollection; and again he speaks, while the Warden tries in vain to comprehend him.*)

"Cowards die many times before their deaths;
The valiant never taste of death but once."

(*He stops again and shudders a trifle; his head droops and he repeats, barely above a whisper*)

"The valiant never taste of death but once."

(*The nearer door on the right is opened noiselessly and the jailer, in obedience to his instructions, steps just inside the room and stands there mute. Father Daly and the Warden glance at the jailer, and with significance at each other, and both rise, tardily. The Warden's hand, as it rests on his desk, is seen to tremble. There is a moment of dead silence; presently Dyke lifts his head and catches sight of the motionless attendant at the*

open door. With a quick intake of his breath, he starts half out of his seat and stares, fascinated; he sinks back slowly, and turns his head to gaze first at Father Daly and then at the Warden. The Warden averts his eyes, but Father Daly's expression is of supreme pity and encouragement. Involuntarily, Dyke's hand again goes creeping upward toward his throat, but he arrests it. He grasps the arms of his chair and braces himself; he rises then, and stands very erect, in almost the position of a soldier at attention.)

THE WARDEN (*swallows hard*). Dyke!

FATHER DALY (*brushes past the Warden, his right hand lifted as though in benediction*). My son!

DYKE (*regards them fixedly; his voice is low and steady*). All right, let's go.

(*He faces about, and with his head held proud and high, and his shoulders squared to the world, he moves slowly toward the open door. Father Daly, with the light of his calling in his eyes, steps in line just ahead of Dyke. The Warden, his mouth set hard, falls in behind. When they have all gone forward a pace or two, Father Daly begins to speak, and Dyke to reply; Father Daly's voice is strong and sweet; and Dyke speaks just after him, not mechanically, but in brave and unfaltering response.*)

FATHER DALY. "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills —"

DYKE. "The valiant never taste of death but once."

FATHER DALY. "From whence cometh my help."

DYKE. "The valiant never taste of death but once."

FATHER DALY (*has almost reached the door; his voice rises a semi-tone, and gains in emotion*). "My help cometh from the Lord which made Heaven and earth."

DYKE. "The valiant never taste of death — but once."

When the Warden, whose hands are tightly clenched, has passed the threshold, the jailer follows and closes the door behind him. There is a very brief pause and then

CURTAIN

ROMANCE OF THE WILLOW PATTERN

A COMIC TRAGEDY
IN A PROLOGUE AND SEVEN FRAGMENTS

BY

ETHEL BEEKMAN VAN DER VEER

CHARACTERS

IN THE PROLOGUE

SPIRIT OF CHANG
SPIRIT OF KOONG-SEE

IN THE FRAGMENTS

THE MANDARIN
KOONG-SEE, *His Daughter*
CHANG, *His Secretary*
PROPERTY MAN } *These two do*
INCENSE BEARER } *not speak.*

SCENES OF THE IMAGINATION

THE PROLOGUE: Heaven and Earth.
FIRST FRAGMENT: Koong-See's Garden.
SECOND FRAGMENT: Interior of Koong-See's House.
SECOND FRAGMENT: The Terrace.
THIRD FRAGMENT: Chang's Island.
FOURTH FRAGMENT: At the Water's Edge in Koong-See's Garden.
FIFTH FRAGMENT: Chang's Island. (*Moonlight*)
SIXTH FRAGMENT: Exterior of the Mandarin's House. (*Moonlight*)
SEVENTH FRAGMENT: The Bridge. (*Moonlight*)

NOTE: The play is done after the Chinese manner, without scenery, except as described in the following.

No painted scenery is used, the little play being presented after the Chinese manner, leaving much to the

imagination, by suggestion, in the use of furnishings and in the dialogue.

Blue curtains, of the tone found in Chinese draperies or screens, are hung across the back of the stage by way of a back-drop.

At back centre is a little platform and on it are two stools or tabourets. This is known as heaven.

There are folding Chinese screens stretched, two on each side of the stage, leaving entrances right and left between the screens and also at back of stage, right and left beyond the second screens.

In the upper right-hand corner, but not so far back as heaven, is a very large cushion which is on the floor and is known as Chang's island.

From Chang's island, two bamboo poles, lying flat on the stage, extend down toward the front, one in the direction of right centre, the other toward the two flat boxes right, front. These bamboo poles are the banks of the tidal river.

The two flat boxes, painted bright red or vermilion, which are down front, right, represent the bridge which spans the swift-currented river, and over which Chang and Koong-See plan to escape. But these boxes do not actually span the river, being placed to the right of it where they will not obstruct a view of the river.

The two tabourets, down left, are placed close together (or a draped box may be used, if it is wide enough for two to sit upon). These are called the Mandarin's house, where dwell Koong-See and her father. The entrance to the house is behind the box or tabourets. This house is also used, without apology, as a garden-seat.

Distance is very deceiving. For instance, it is not far from heaven to the Mandarin's house, but from Chang's

island to the bridge that leads across the stream to the Mandarin's garden is many miles. It is also a great distance that the little cocoanut-shell boat has to travel back and forth between the garden of Koong-See and Chang's island, but with the assistance of the Property Man the trips are quickly accomplished, while many weary hours are dragging themselves away.

Costumes

Koong-See *wears a long, gaily embroidered tunic with a rather long skirt. (Under no circumstances should she wear trousers.) Gold head-dress, with flowers and dangling tassels. Black wig in conventional Chinese style. Many jewels.*

Chang *wears blue tunic and white trousers; small round hat; queue; cooly-hat and a black scarf for disguise.*

The Mandarin *wears a magnificent embroidered coat and skirt, with a lavish display of gold. Large hat with upturned brim and peacock-feather. His fan is immense and so is he, towering high above the others, and, a yard wide. He also has a purse.*

Property Man *wears plain dark blue cooly-costume; queue.*

Incense Bearer *wears light-colored flowing robes.*

ROMANCE OF THE WILLOW PATTERN

Overture

Chinese Music . . . *Using effects of Chinese instruments.*

Selections Suggested { *Feast of the Little Lanterns,* by Paul Bliss (Overture) / *Chinese Wedding Procession,* by Hosmer (Columbia Rec.)

The Prologue

The gong sounds and the Incense Bearer crosses the stage, bearing a bowl of burning incense. Then the lights at the back disclose the Spirits of Koong-See and Chang. They are seated facing each other, Koong-See on the stage-right, Chang on stage-left, silhouetted against the gorgeous lighting of Chinese Heaven. After a moment they kowtow to each other as elaborately and gravely as space will permit. They resume their former positions.

Spirit of Chang. Adorable Koong-See! Here upon two august clouds, high in the celestial heaven, invisible to the eyes of those mortals far below on the terrestrial plane, we hold counsel.

Spirit of Koong-See. Most honorable and adorable Chang! As we are decided upon a mission of enlightenment, would it not, perhaps, be wise to assume the mortal

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form and become visible to this most exalted assemblage, in order that their limited understanding may become clarified?

SPIRIT OF CHANG. O Perfect Koong-See, most profoundly correct are your words which fall from your lips as petals of plum blossoms disturbed by the wind of wisdom.

SPIRIT OF KOONG-SEE. We must call to our aid from out the Seven Hells, the Spirit of my father, the Mandarin.

SPIRIT OF CHANG. He too must become visible.

SPIRIT OF KOONG-SEE. And we shall require the services of a mere mortal — (*pointing to the Audience*) such as one of them.

SPIRIT OF CHANG. Ah yes, the Property Man. But *he* shall remain *in*visible.

SPIRIT OF KOONG-SEE. Perhaps we had better explain to them — (*waving toward Audience*) lest they perchance may be stupid and dull of comprehension.

SPIRIT OF CHANG (*condescendingly*). If we are to reach their understanding, we must descend to their plane.

SPIRIT OF KOONG-SEE (*business of preparing for the descent*). We start on the long descent from heaven. (*Business of descending, Chang timing his movements to hers.*) We arrive upon the terrestrial plane. (*They come down together. Their voices and manners brighten and the front lights now replace the lights of heaven. Koong-See turns happily to Chang.*) I feel once more and know the light of earth.

CHANG. Again we know its fragrance. Again we taste its sorrows — and its joys! (*They bow to each other, rise, turn to the Audience, kowtow three times to them and rise.*)

KOONG-SEE (*to the Audience*). Most clever, brilliant and accomplished Audience —

CHANG. With intelligence beyond words —

KOONG-SEE. We humbly desire to inform you that the Property Man is invisible to you. In short, you do not see him.

CHANG. No.

KOONG-SEE (*to Chang*). And now, let us further enlighten them, that our most atrocious and abominable presence here may be accounted for.

CHANG (*to Koong-See*). I pray you, O most exquisite of Moon-beams, to commence.

KOONG-SEE. Nay, my unworthy tongue cannot control sufficient eloquence to sway this most distinguished throng. I pray you to begin.

CHANG. That would be an honor I find myself most unworthy of accepting.

KOONG-SEE. We might, perhaps, relate each our own part?

CHANG. O charming, superb and delicate lotus, the marvellous wisdom of your decision is unworthily accepted.

KOONG-SEE (*to the Audience*). O Most-Noble, High-Born and Exalted Audience: This is our Prologue. The

rest of our tale is in Three Fragments. When you see the Incense Bearer pass, you may know that a fragment is ended and that the next fragment is about to appear.

CHANG. The Incense means the lapse of time.

KOONG-SEE. At first long weary months go by. (*She signs to Chang.*)

KOONG-SEE AND CHANG (*to the Audience*). We are the Spirits of those two lovers —

CHANG. Koong-See, the Fair — (*indicating her. She curtsies to him.*)

KOONG-SEE AND CHANG. And —

KOONG-SEE. Chang, the Good (*indicating him. He bows to her.*)

CHANG. Whose fortunes have been told and retold for countless ages upon the Willow Pattern Plate.

KOONG-SEE. For centuries we have been frozen into cold china, in the form of two doves —

CHANG. Which are the symbols of exalted Lover Spirits. (*They bow low to each other and to the Audience, then Koong-See goes left of stage and indicates the two tabourets.*)

KOONG-SEE. This is my house where I lived with my august father. It is surrounded by this garden and beach — (*she indicates them*) which lead to the shore of a swift flowing river.

CHANG (*going up stage-right*). And this is my island, which you have noticed in the upper left-hand corner of

the plate. I would call your august attention to its seeming proximity to that most magnificent edifice, the home of my adorable Koong-See. But, pray you, look at it with your imaginative eye and you will see that it is really many miles distant. . . . You will observe that I have to cross this river to get to it. (*He raises the bamboo poles.*) This — is the river — most beauteous stream! (*He replaces the poles.*)

Koong-See (*indicating the low red boxes down right*). And this is the most excellent bridge which leads from my garden across the stream to another island, upon which is the gardener's hut.

Chang (*coming down to the bridge*). Upon this bridge took place that great climax which we will show you again at the end of our play. Notice with care the method of transformation. It occurred when the Moon Goddess was high in her heavens and bathed the scene in the radiance of her pale blue light.

Koong-See. And now, O most honorable guests, we will retire and reenact our tragic story before you. Let your vivid imagination be well tested and then picture the scene as we have described it to you. (*They bow and go off, right and left. A slight pause. An Incense Bearer crosses the stage to show that the Prologue is ended. A Gong sounds to indicate that the First Fragment is about to begin.*)

The First Fragment

(*Koong-See enters left, walks around the Mandarin's house and sits upon the garden bench — which, of course, is the same thing.*)

KOONG-SEE. Here will I sit, in the soft pink light of the falling eventide. My nurse, within the house, is fast asleep. My honorable father has gone to the Imperial palace upon affairs of state — to see the Emperor, the Son of Heaven — (*She kowtows.*) Perchance my father's secretary, the handsome and clever Chang, may hither find his way. If that be so, may the High Gods detain my father long and keep my nurse in slumbers deep. (*Chang enters, right, and steps on the bridge. She sees him in the distance, shading her eyes with her hand, the better to make sure it is he.*) Aie! Aie! I think I see his noble form yet distant on the bridge.

CHANG. Here upon the centre of this august bridge I stand. The gentle river slowly makes its lapping way beneath my feet. Why! Yonder in her garden, not fifty yards away, sits my lady love — perchance awaiting me. I will leave this bridge and step into her enchanting garden, thus — (*he does so, with ceremony*) and exchange gentle heart flutterings with her. (*He enters the garden. Koong-See rises and they bow to each other three times.*) I trust my presence does not disturb you, O Sweetest Flower in all the Kingdom.

KOONG-SEE. Indeed no, Most Fascinating Secretary. But my Honorable Father and my excellent nurse would be perturbed to find you here.

CHANG. Then, Fair Daughter of the High Mandarin, you think it would be well for me to depart?

KOONG-SEE (*demurely; concealing her face from him with her fan*). It would be a most delicate and discreet action.

CHANG. I will remove my unwelcome presence from your sight. (*He bows and starts to leave.*)

KOONG-SEE (*hastily, to stop him*). It would be discreet, perhaps — but your absence would seriously detract from my pleasure.

CHANG. Then, clearly, it is my humble duty to remain.

KOONG-SEE (*with a little gurgling laugh*). Be seated — in my unworthy garden.

CHANG. With exquisite pleasure I obey your noble behest to be seated in this surpassingly beautiful paradise.

(*Music: "The Lady Picking Mulberries," by Kelly.*) (*Koong-See runs away from Chang and starts to dance. He joins her and together they dance with much precision and ceremony. They sit. The music dies away.*)

KOONG-SEE. I fear you think me very bold, in thus entertaining you.

CHANG. My inferior brain would not dare to harbor such a dastardly thought.

KOONG-SEE. To-day I am feeling most unhappy. (*Business of Chang showing his deep concern.*) I have recently been informed that when the peach-tree blooms in the Spring, I am to be married to Kee-Lung, the wealthy Ta-Gin. My honorable father told me that this Ta-Gin was young and handsome, but he is ancient and wizened. I know, for as he left the house, I peeped at him through my shutters, and I knew then that my August Father *lied*. He is like a last year's apple, withering on the ground.

CHANG. Heaven will not permit such a sacrifice!

KOONG-SEE. I have prayed to the High Gods — (*Pause. Both kowtow*) to avert this calamity. I have

burned incense before the tablets of my ancestors. But my unworthy prayers have not been answered.

CHANG. They have been heard, O my White Lotus Blossom, and you see before you the humble instrument of their fulfillment. I am so filled with the noble courage of my ancestors, that I dare to lift my miserable faded eyes to you, even presuming to ask your unblemished hand in matrimony. Deign to tell me that you do not look upon me with disfavor.

KOONG-SEE. Nay, you find naught but favor in my eyes. But, most delightful Chang, I fear that my esteemed parent would never, never give his august consent to our marriage.

CHANG. Then, my heart's beloved, we must with craft and cunning ignore his august authority.

KOONG-SEE. But, in that event, he would have it in his power to cause us both to be ignominiously put to death. And that, since I am convinced of your tender love for me, would be most distasteful.

CHANG. Oh, my Koong-See, does fear, like a black moth, lie trembling in your gentle soul?

KOONG-SEE (*looking up at him with love in her eyes*). I know no fear, for I have searched the innermost temples of my heart, and I find there nothing but the most celestial love for you.

CHANG (*rising in ecstasy*). A delirious happiness enthralls me; my spirit is like unto a kite, flying high in the heavens! (*They sit again, side by side.*) Under the kindly shelter of the blue night we will flee together to some beauteous distant land, where we shall be blissfully

united. When did you feel the first warm flutter of your heart toward me?

KOONG-SEE. On the night when, at the peril of your life, you broke through the hedge of oleanders, scattering their petals far and wide, to converse with me; the night when, in the absence of my nurse, we two watched the moonflowers bloom, and you put your magnificently strong arm about me.

CHANG (*placing his arm about her*). Permit me to again put my unworthy arm about you — thus.

KOONG-SEE (*coyly, pretending to be as shocked as a Chinese maiden should*). It is not etiquette! (*But she leans her head blissfully against his shoulder.*)

(NOTE: *From off stage, each time the Mandarin enters, there is a shrill tapping on wood and a picking upon a string instrument, in unison, in accented, quick march time: Tum-tum-tum-tum, Tum-tum-tum-tum, until he speaks.*)

(*The Mandarin enters. He sees them and looks dumfounded as he creeps down back of them from the upper left. His face is convulsed with rage and he looks very big and impressive and terrible, towering high above the lovers.*

CHANG (*tenderly to Koong-See*). Like the water-fowl in the cleft, so shall you dwell forever within my heart.

(*The Mandarin jerks Koong-See away from Chang.*)

MANDARIN (*furiously, in a great voice, to Chang*). What does this mean? How dare you enter this forbidden ground?

CHANG (*simply*). I love the radiant Koong-See, and I would wed with her.

MANDARIN (*snorting*). What unheard-of insolence!

KOONG-SEE (*trembling*). And I love the handsome Chang — and I will marry none but Chang!

MANDARIN (*glowering terrifically*). Wretched inferior offspring! You will marry whom I please and dwell behind locked doors until your wedding-day.

KOONG-SEE (*her hands clasped appealingly*). Oh, Honorably cruel Parent —

MANDARIN. Say no more, or by the Sacred Hogs of the Emperor, I shall have you whipped like a common slave. (*And to Chang*) And you, most infamous and inadequate secretary, begone! (*Chang bows to him elaborately.*) If ever again you enter within my garden gates, I shall have your head taken off without delay. And your — lady love — shall see it *roll* from the *block!*

(*Chang bows again, with courteous deliberation. Koong-See breaks from her father and runs to her lover, pushing him frantically.*)

KOONG-SEE (*to Chang*). Begone at once, so that your adorable head may rest upon its accustomed foundation!

CHANG (*in a low tone to her*). Ere the peach-tree blooms, I will come for you.

KOONG-SEE (*in a low, but anxious tone*). I shall be waiting —

MANDARIN (*clapping his hands*). Ho! Guards!

KOONG-SEE (*in an agony of fear, to Chang*). Go! Go!

(*There is a sound of scurrying feet and of swords being drawn, off stage.*)

(*Chang again bows with exaggerated politeness, first to the Mandarin, then to Koong-See. The Guard seems to be drawing nearer, but Chang leaves quietly and deliberately, going off to the right, over the bridge.*)

MANDARIN (*to Koong-See*). To your prison! At once! To your prison! (*He points to the house and Koong-See slowly enters. The Mandarin majestically follows her off to the left.*)

(*The Incense Bearer enters and fills the scene with clouds of burning incense, then goes on off. This is the end of the First Fragment. The Gong sounds and we know that the Second Fragment is about to begin.*)

THE SECOND FRAGMENT

(*Long weary months have elapsed. Koong-See is in her prison. She sits facing where Chang went off. Her sam-gin, a round-faced string instrument lies in her lap. Presently she begins to croon a plaintive little song accompanying herself on her sam-gin. It is late afternoon.*)

KOONG-SEE (*crooning*).

Ere the peach-tree blossoms, you'll come to me,
Chang, my love! Chang, my love!
E'en over the mountains, over the sea,
Chang, my love! Chang, my love!
You are far away o'er the waters blue,
Chang, my love! Chang, my love!
In my prison I wait, I wait for you,
Chang, my love! Chang, my love!

(*Her voice dies away just as she has nearly finished the song, her fingers scrape a last discordant sound on the sam-gin and, overcome with melancholy longing, she buries her head in her arms. Presently she looks out at the willow-tree.*)

KOONG-SEE. Sadly, from my window, I have watched the willow blossoms opening to the sun. (*She turns to the peach-tree.*) And now, O peach-tree, it is nearly time for you to bloom. (*Stretching out her arms in appeal, she kowtows.*) Kind Goddess of the Peach, I pray you, for my sake and for the sake of Chang the Good, to request your honorable tree to put forth its beautiful buds, for I am weary of waiting.

(*The Mandarin enters from the left and calls.*)

MANDARIN (*loudly*). Koong-See! Koong-See! Come to your window!

(*Koong-See appears at her window, by kneeling upon the tabourets which are the Mandarin's house.*)

KOONG-SEE. What is your will, August Father?

MANDARIN. It is nearing that fortunate age of the moon when your marriage-feast begins. The presents from your esteemed prospective husband have arrived — (*he holds out a jewel-casket made of sandalwood and inlaid with gems*) among them, this box of jewels.

KOONG-SEE (*indifferently*). Yes, August Father.

MANDARIN (*watching her closely, opening the box, believing the contents to be irresistible to a woman; holding out a necklace*). This necklace of jade, so soft and warm — now, what do you think of this?

KOONG-SEE (*bored*). It is excellent indeed.

MANDARIN (*holding out a magnificent bracelet, dripping pearls*). This bracelet of deep-sea pearls! Aha! Now what do you think of the wealthy Kee-Lung?

KOONG-SEE (*dutifully*). 'Twas very kind and courteous. Extend to him my thanks.

MANDARIN (*handing her the box and trying to tempt her further*). And these are not the only gifts — there is also a silver-covered pig!

(*An idea comes to Koong-See, and she turns ingenuously to explain it to the Audience.*)

KOONG-SEE (*to Audience*). I shall use subterfuge, in order to obtain my freedom. (*And then to the Mandarin, enthusiastically.*) Oh, August Father! A silver-covered pig! Would that I might see it!

MANDARIN (*nodding*). *Colossal* in size! (*And he stretches wide his arms to indicate its immensity.*) Now, if you have at last become submissive to my will, you may gaze upon its magnificence.

KOONG-SEE. Highly respected parent, I am the most submissive creature in all the kingdom! (*She bows.*) I greatly desire to gaze upon the honorable Mr. Pig. Therefore I assume that you will permit me to leave my prison?

MANDARIN (*fanning himself*). By no means. But I will have the gifts sent for your inspection. Is your penitent heart grateful for this kindly favor?

KOONG-SEE (*disappointed, but not losing hope*). Yes, most amiable father, your insignificant female child is

indeed grateful. (*Bowing low.*) And now, graciously august father, since I am so filled with filial piety, will you not allow me to walk upon the beach before the sun sets? (*She points to her cheeks.*) I am grown pale from being so much indoors.

MANDARIN. I will see that you are supplied with much red paint with which to cover that unhealthy pallor.

KOONG-SEE. But that is not all; my eyes are like two lanterns which have burned out after a feast.

MANDARIN. When you see the brilliant and handsome Kee-Lung, your eyes will sparkle like glow-worms in the dark!

KOONG-SEE. But I fear the brilliant and handsome Kee-Lung will reproach you when first he beholds me, you see — (*cajoling, with much flattery of tone*) I am losing the great beauty which I inherited from you, my magnificent and exalted Father!

MANDARIN (*visibly puffed up*). Now that would indeed be a calamity. But tell me this: have you renounced all thought of the vile and infamous Chang?

KOONG-SEE (*subtly*). Chang? — Chang? (*She searches her memory.*) Ah yes! You refer to your miserable former secretary. I had almost forgotten his name! That was but a momentary madness sent upon me by the Moon Goddess, in revenge for some fancied slight.

MANDARIN (*dryly*). Undoubtedly. But, suppose the Moon Goddess should again become angry?

KOONG-SEE (*sweeping the sky with her hand*). She is buried now, deep in the heavens. See! There is no moon visible to-day.

MANDARIN (*relentingly*). You may walk upon the beach — provided that you will not attempt to escape.

KOONG-SEE. That would be the last thought which would enter the guileless mind of your dutiful child.

MANDARIN. Will you swear this by the sacred name of your revered ancestors?

KOONG-SEE. I swear it by the memory of my mother and that of my honored grandmothers and my equally honored grandfathers; by my respected great-grandparents and my equally respected great-great-grandparents; by my exalted great-great-great-grandparents and my equally respected great —

MANDARIN (*cutting her short*). It is enough! You may take as much exercise as you desire.

KOONG-SEE. Oh, Most Cherished Father! After your demise I will burn incense continually before your shrine and scatter scented paper over your grave. Aie! I give thanks to the gods for so kind and clement a parent. (*She kowtows very low and remains for a moment with her head down. The Property Man hands the Mandarin a large key with which he unlocks the prison door in pantomime. Then the Mandarin goes out to the left. Slowly Koong-See rises, listening intently.*)

KOONG-SEE. The lock is turned and I am free at last! I can now step out upon the terrace. (*She does so.*) I have sworn a solemn oath — which I have no intention of keeping. I am like the wood which bends but breaks not — for I love Chang. Besides, being a female creature, I could not enter the highest heaven in any event — and I love Chang! (*She looks frightened at her daring.*)

Yet a great fear crushes me in its bat-like wings, for in their mighty wrath the spirits of my ancestors may wreak vengeance upon me. But there was no other way, and without Chang my life is like an almond-tree stripped of its fruit. (*She clasps her hands in supplication.*) O Spirit of Heaven, pity me, for I love him as the wakening dawn loves light! (*Kneeling, she reaches her hands out toward the sea.*) O Spirit of Water, bring my love to me in safety over your azure sea! (*Prostrating herself.*) O Spirit of the Earth, forgive, forgive, forgive! (*She remains prostrated. The Incense Bearer crosses and we know that the Second Fragment is ended. The Gong sounds and we know that the Third Fragment is about to begin.*)

The Third Fragment

(*Bells are heard, very faintly, as from a distance.*)

(*Chang appears upon his island and gazes out at sea. He is holding a little boat, made from the half of a cocoanut shell which the Property Man has just handed him. It has a yellow sail like that of a Chinese junk. The Property Man hangs a silver crescent moon upon a bit of blue drapery which is thrown over a screen on the right of the stage. There is now a soft blue light flooding the scene. The Property Man retires.*)

Chang. Far across the sea the temple bells are ringing. And near the temple waits my love, the willow weaving shadows on her prison walls. In this tiny boat, made from the shell of the friendly cocoanut, I will send to her a token — (*Property Man hands him a twig*) this branch of the budding peach. The little house which I am building, nestled in the green pavilion of trees, is

almost complete, and there, if the High Gods permit (*he kowtows*) we will dwell in joy upon this happy island. A thousand flowers will whisper secrets to us in the evening breeze and wild birds fill the air with songs of love. (*He sets the boat gently in the river.*) Go, then, little Ship of Faith, to my Beauty-among-the-mountains-towering-high, and carry this branch of promise to play upon the lutestrings of her heart. (*He fastens the boat to the pole which the Property Man holds out and the little boat goes slowly down the stream until it reaches Koong-See's garden beach. There the Property Man leaves it and retires. The Incense Bearer crosses, indicating the end of the Third Fragment. The Gong sounds for the Fourth Fragment. Then slowly Koong-See raises her head until she is sitting upright upon the shore of the river. She gazes out at sea.*)

The Fourth Fragment

Koong-See. Through endless burning days and through long hours of the night I have waited and watched, yet Chang comes not. (*She looks fearfully at the willow tree.*) The willow blossom already droops upon the bow, and with it my hopes are slowly withering, for Chang comes not. It must be that Chang is dead — for he comes not! If he is dead, I shall follow through the dry river of the dead — through all the heavens and hells will I search for him. Oh, Chang, to-night, when the moon is high, your faithful Koong-See will sink with the lotus blooms beneath the deep water. (*She looks down at the water and sees the little boat.*) What a pretty toy came floating with the tide; perchance it is a good omen. (*She picks it up and sees the little twig.*) And within — a branch of the budding peach! It is a token from

Chang! At last, at last! (*she thinks*) The tide is turning, therefore I will send to him a message, written by the aid of the tender light of the young moon. (*She takes from her sleeve an ivory tablet, and a needle from her hair, with which she writes her message:*) "Do not wise husbandmen gather the fruits which they fear will be stolen? The sunshine lengthens and the vineyard threatens to be spoiled at the hands of strangers." (*She places the tablet in the boat.*) I will fetch incense, and if it continues to burn, I will know by this sign that the Goddess of the Water ceases not her watchful care. (*The Property Man hands her incense and she solemnly places it in the boat, which she starts on its way, attached to the Property Man's pole.*) Go forth, little boat, under the moonswept skies, and carry this message to my love. (*She kowtows to the Goddess of the Water.*) Great Goddess of the Water, protect this fragile barque and keep its light burning, even as our love burns warmly on the cold sea of life. (*She watches the boat until it is out of sight, being moved slowly upstream by the Property Man. Then Koong-See goes out to left. The Property Man retires when Chang releases the boat from the pole. The Incense Bearer crosses. Gong rings.*)

The Fifth Fragment

Chang. Behold! My boat returns to me! Alas, what omen can it be? My branch of blossoms gone and in its place this tablet! (*He is still seated. He takes the tablet and reads the message.*) "Do not wise husbandmen gather the fruits which they fear will be stolen? The sunshine lengthens and the vineyard threatens to be spoiled at the hands of strangers." (*He rises energetically.*) Too long have I tarried! Against my will have I tarried,

stifling my impatience, to prepare this nest for her, my princess of delight — she of the pale hands and the cloudlike hair. At once will I go to her; the good boat is waiting. Oh, that it had the speed of lightning to carry me to my heart's beloved. Though dangers threaten, I will overcome them; through the swords of a thousand mandarins will I make my way. Though the Mandarin be cunning, yet with greater cunning will I meet him, Disguised as a beggar will I go to her and we will together flee to the land of blissful unity. May the Spirits of the Sea and Air and Sky lend us their aid! Koong-See, I come! (*He goes off, upper right. The Property Man takes the little boat and removes the moon, then retires. Incense Bearer crosses. Gong rings.*)

The Sixth Fragment

(*The Mandarin enters. He carries a huge peacock feather fan which he uses majestically. He is mellow from the wine he has had and reeks with self-satisfaction as he struts up and down, fanning and conversing with himself. The stage is but dimly lighted as at the moment there is no moon.*)

Mandarin. Now joy unbounded fills my soul! For in the morn, my child, Koong-See will wed the Ta-Gin great — the rich Kee-Lung! Many and many a cup of wine have I exchanged with him to-night! The gods are kind indeed — they know that I am filled with piety. Hic! (*He rolls his eyes piously upward.*) How clever have I been to manage this affair — (*He laughs.*) How women do love jewels! All is safely settled, now. And in the fragrant air of night, I must congratulate myself! (*During the Mandarin's speech Chang has entered, dis-*

guised as a beggar. His disguise consists of a black scarf, a coolie's hat and a white goatee which he holds up to his chin whenever he speaks to the Mandarin. On first seeing the Mandarin, he slinks back as though he were afraid of him and cowers on the ground, so that, when the Mandarin finishes speaking and struts about again, he almost steps on Chang.)

MANDARIN. Why, what is this? (*He peers at Chang*) A beggar, bless my soul! Who are you, my good fellow?

CHANG (*in a quavering whine*). Alms! Alms!

MANDARIN. Alms? Would you not prefer wine?

CHANG. Alms! Alms!

MANDARIN. Alms? Would you not prefer air? (*Handing his fan to Chang magnanimously.*) Take all the air you want, my good man!

CHANG. Alms! Alms! !

MANDARIN (*his tone changing; disgusted with the stupid fellow*). Wrah! You care for nothing but alms! There! (*He throws a gold piece to the ground.*) Take that and be off! (*With a wave of dismissal, the Mandarin goes out, left. Chang hunts about and finds the coin. Incense Bearer crosses. The Gong rings.*)

THE SEVENTH FRAGMENT

(*Koong-See comes in from the left. She does not see Chang who is still crouching on the ground.*)

KOONG-SEE (*with raised hands*). Dear Goddess of the Moon, send forth your pale beams to guide me on the path which leads to the land where my lover dwells.

(*The Property Man replaces the moon. Pale blue light again floods the scene. Chang rises, still wearing his disguise, and stealthily starts toward the left. Koong-See starts on her journey, going to the right. Seeing Chang, she gives a startled cry, for she does not recognize him through his disguise.*)

CHANG. Do not fear — it is I.

KOONG-SEE. Chang!

CHANG. I have come to fetch you to a distant isle where we may dwell in safety. Come quickly, quickly! A boat awaits us near the gardener's hut. But first go fetch your jewels and distaff!

(*Koong-See takes a step toward the house. The Property Man hands her the jewel box and distaff. She quickly returns to Chang.*)

KOONG-SEE. Through all the kingdoms I will follow you. Will you carry this, my courageous lover? (*In her haste to hand him the jewel casket, it falls to the ground and the jewels scatter.*) Alas, I have disturbed the jewel casket most ungraciously, dear Chang. (*The sound of running is heard from off to the left.*) Assist me to replace them, for I hear my father coming! (*Together they gather up the jewels.*) Oh, hasten, my beloved, for my augustly irate parent pursues with horribly terrific wrath!

(*The Mandarin enters, running furiously, but making little progress, treadmill fashion, to indicate the distance he has to travel. He makes more and more noise as he comes nearer and nearer. He is really quite terrifying, for as he came in the Property Man handed him a sword.*)

KOONG-SEE (*pointing to the Mandarin*). Behold, he runs with speed across the garden toward us!

CHANG. Fear not, my beauteous Koong-See, (*He passes her in front of him onto the bridge.*) your exalted parent cannot overtake us.

(*The Mandarin makes a final dash as Chang steps upon the bridge.*)

MANDARIN. Indeed! Can he not! You revel too early in your intended escape! (*He plunges the sword through Chang, who drops back from the bridge and falls to the ground with a dreadful groan.*)

CHANG. Alas, my adorable Koong-See, your august father has permitted my life to become finished.

(*Koong-See throws herself despairingly over the body of her lover. Then, with a malicious gleam in his eye, the Mandarin plunges the sword into Koong-See.*)

KOONG-SEE. Oi-yah! Oi-yah! He has awarded the same privilege to me!

(*They die, and the Mandarin stands gloating over his heartless deed. Meantime the Property Man has unobtrusively crossed the back of the stage and come down on the extreme right. He now holds out a flag-shaped dark cloth fastened like a flag to a bamboo rod, and this conceals the bodies of the lovers, indeed, it has the power to render them invisible while the transformation occurs. This is affected when the Property Man raises aloft from behind the dark cloth two large painted blue doves, cut from cardboard. The doves are kissing, as they appear on the plate, and they are the translated souls of the faithful lovers.*)

THE DOVES. Coo! Coroo! Coroo!

MANDARIN (*in great astonishment*). Oi-yah! They have been turned into doves! The High Gods must indeed be with them! (*He prostrates himself before the doves, which is no easy task for him, he is so very big and so very fat.*)

CURTAIN

THE GRILL

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

GEORGE WOODRUFF JOHNSTON

CHARACTERS

THE MAID: *In appearance a quiet, efficient, well-trained servant, dressed in a black housemaid's uniform, with white collar, cuffs, and apron. At opening, she is enveloped in a black domino with hood.*

TRENT, *District Attorney: A strong, handsome man, of the slender, supple type, about 35 years old. He wears a Tuxedo suit.*

ALICE, *his wife: A pretty, emotional girl in the early twenties. She is dressed in an informal dinner-gown.*

THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE: *A burly, thick-necked individual, about 45 years of age. He wears a loose, ill-fitting cutaway suit, and carries a light-weight overcoat and a soft felt hat.*

SCENE: *The library in Trent's apartment.*

TIME: *The Present.*

THE GRILL

Place

The library of the District Attorney's apartment. There is a doorway at centre, closed by hangings, and a practical door up left. Down centre stands a large library table, with a telephone, and a book-rack — containing an upright row of books — upon it, and a chair at either side. At right, a davenport, with a small round table placed in front and a little to the left of it. Against the left wall, a safe, and alongside of it a waste-paper basket, empty. On the wall at each side of the centre door, an electric push-button. Easy chairs, warm-toned rugs, books and magazines, give the room a comfortable, homelike appearance.

(Curtain rises on a pitch-dark stage, with Maid, unrecognizable in domino and hood, kneeling in front of safe. After a moment, she flashes an electric hand-lamp on combination and turns it back and forth, keeping her hand (without rings) well within the disc of light. She then opens safe-door wide, throws light into its interior, and hurriedly examines its contents. While doing so, a telephone bell rings shrilly, and continues to ring at intervals. At first sound of bell, Maid switches off her lamp, slams safe door without turning combination, springs to her feet, and, switching on the flash-lamp

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again, makes with it a wide sweep from left to right, thus blinding eyes of audience while she makes a quick and silent exit through door up left, closing it softly behind her. She throws off her domino, and crosses off-stage as quickly as possible to centre door.)

TRENT (*offstage; calling*). Mary!

(*Lights appear in hallway outside centre door, and Maid enters composedly through it. She presses wall-button on left of door, and all stage lights go on full-bright. She then goes down to library table and picks up telephone, whereupon bell stops ringing.*)

MAID (*at telephone*). Hello? . . . Yes, this is the District Attorney's apartment! . . . Just a moment, please! (*As she turns to leave the room, Alice enters through centre door, followed by Trent.*)

MAID. Oh, Mr. Trent; the Commissioner of Police is downstairs.

TRENT (*standing at library table, his back to Alice, lighting a cigarette. To Maid*). Have him come right up, Mary.

MAID (*at telephone*). All right! Show the gentleman up, please!

(*Maid hangs up receiver, and begins to set room in order. Some of the newspapers lying about she folds neatly and replaces on library table; others she stuffs into waste-paper basket below safe.*) *Alice, on entering, has slowly crossed right, has picked up her sewing-bag lying on small round table, and seated herself on davenport. During the foregoing she has sat there, lost in thought, her work forgotten in her lap.*)

ALICE (*finally, to Trent*). The Commissioner of Police?

TRENT (*turns to face Alice, and leans against the table, smoking*). Yes.

ALICE (*slowly, thoughtfully*). What does *he* want?

TRENT (*casually*). I asked him to come here to-night. I want him to go over the evidence in those graft cases with me.

ALICE (*regretfully*). Oh, how I wish you'd never had anything to do with them!

(*Door-bell rings off. Maid pays no attention to bell, but picks up filled waste-paper basket and starts toward left door.*)

TRENT (*eyeing Maid keenly*). Never mind the basket, Mary! Go to the door! Don't keep the Commissioner waiting!

(*Maid, after a moment's reluctant hesitation, returns and replaces basket on floor below safe. Then she exits through centre door, Trent's gaze constantly fixed upon her.*)

ALICE (*after a glance over her shoulder to assure herself that Maid has left the room, rises and crosses to Trent. Anxiously, appealingly*). Don't drag those grafters into court! Don't make enemies of them! Oh, I beg you! I beg you! They'd stop at nothing. I'm worried about you every minute! Drop the case, won't you? Please! . . . please! . . . for my sake!

(*Commissioner and Maid have appeared in hallway outside centre door. As she takes his hat and coat, they stand listening to Alice and Trent.*)

TRENT (*to Alice; gently, reassuringly*). Dear little girl! You mustn't worry about me! I know what I'm doing. Everything will turn out all right!

MAID (*standing just within centre door*). Mr. Trent . . . the Commissioner of Police!

(*Alice crosses dispiritedly to below round table. Commissioner comes down to meet Trent. Maid exits.*)

TRENT (*advancing to meet Commissioner*). Hello, Commissioner! I'm glad to see you. (*They shake hands warmly. Trent leads Commissioner down to Alice.*)

TRENT. Let me introduce you to my wife!

COMMISSIONER (*awkwardly, but heartily*). Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Trent!

ALICE (*polite, but preoccupied*). Thank you!

COMMISSIONER (*after a slight, rather awkward pause, glances at his watch, then at Alice, and, finally, at Trent*). Well, Trent! I'm a busy man! The sooner . . .

ALICE (*interrupting, smilingly*). I can take a hint, Commissioner. I know I'm in the way. (*She turns, gathers up her work, and searches about on round table and davenport for a thimble or other misplaced object. For a time, the lines read by the two men do not reach her consciousness.*)

COMMISSIONER (*his back to Alice and facing Trent*). Well? How about this evidence? You think you've got 'em, do you?

TRENT. Got them, Commissioner? Got them? (*Holds up a tightly clenched fist.*) I've got them like this! I've

evidence enough . . . more than enough . . . to send a dozen of our city officials to the penitentiary!

COMMISSIONER (*good humoredly*). I don't envy you your job, just the same. Many a hot-headed young district attorney has gone to smash trying to do that very thing!

(*Alice starts, pauses in her search, glances swiftly at Commissioner, moves upstage behind davenport, and, thereafter, listens attentively to all that is said.*)

TRENT. It may be. But wait till you see the evidence *I* have! I want to convince *you*. Then I want you to back *me*. I need your power as Police Commissioner to uncover the big crooks . . . the ones who *own* City Hall! (*He starts toward safe.*)

COMMISSIONER. Oh, that's it, is it? It's the men higher up you're after?

TRENT (*halts at table and swings around to face Commissioner. Forcibly; pounding table*). Yes! And I'll get them yet . . . I don't care who they are!

COMMISSIONER (*with the same rough good-humor as before*). You've come to the right shop, Trent. I'll help you all I can.

(*As Commissioner turns toward chair at right of table, he observes Alice listening to and watching him. Their eyes meet and hold an instant. Then he sits down. Alice, on seeing that Commissioner has caught her eavesdropping, crosses to him at once.*)

ALICE (*smiling*). Now, I really am going! Good-night, Commissioner!

COMMISSIONER (*partly rising*). Good-night, Mrs. Trent!

(*He sits again. Alice starts toward centre door. Trent, at safe: to his apparent surprise, he finds it unlocked.*)

TRENT. Alice! Wait, please! Have you been in the safe to-night?

ALICE (*halting abruptly at door and facing Trent*). I . . . ? No! Why?

TRENT. It's unlocked! . . . open! (*He swings safe-door open, and starts back as though thunderstruck.*) They're gone!

ALICE (*crossing rapidly toward safe*). Oh, Bob! What do you mean?

TRENT (*rummages in safe; then rises and faces the others*). Why! . . . the papers! . . . the evidence I've just been talking about! Letters; affidavits; everything . . . . Gone!

COMMISSIONER (*crosses to safe*). What . . . ?

TRENT (*bitterly*). The very evidence I was going to present to the grand jury to-morrow! Now, I haven't a leg to stand on! I'll be laughed out of court! (*He moves downstage, left, anxious, unstrung.*)

COMMISSIONER. Say! . . . that's fierce!

ALICE (*to Commissioner; excitedly, appealingly*). Can't you find them, Commissioner? Can't you do *something?*

COMMISSIONER (*after a moment's reflection; his gaze fixed on safe*). When did you last see them, Trent?

TRENT. Just before dinner. I brought them home from the office to show you, and locked them up in the safe there.

COMMISSIONER. Sure?

TRENT. Positive!

COMMISSIONER. Anything else missing . . . jewelry? . . . money?

TRENT. Hold on! I never thought of money! (*He hurries upstage, takes a small japanned-tin box out of safe and hands it to Alice.*) Alice; do you happen to remember how much you had in this box of yours?

ALICE (*opens box and stares bewilderedly into it. Amazed, she breathes*). Why! . . . it's empty!

COMMISSIONER (*taking box from Alice's hands and examining it*). You had money in here, did you?

ALICE. Yes! Some! But it wasn't mine. It belonged to the Red Cross.

(*Alice sinks despondently into chair at left of table. Commissioner crosses to safe; examines door, and tests combination. Trent stoops and eagerly looks on.*)

COMMISSIONER. This *was* a slick job. There isn't a mark or a scratch on the safe. (*Rising to his feet.*) Who, beside yourself, knew the combination, Trent?

TRENT. My wife.

COMMISSIONER. Anyone else?

TRENT. No.

COMMISSIONER. Did anyone know you put the papers in the safe?

TRENT. Yes. I mentioned it to Mrs. Trent at dinner.

COMMISSIONER. Tell anybody else?

TRENT. No! Nobody!

COMMISSIONER (*leans against safe, his hands in his pockets, his gaze fixed on Alice. Finally, to Alice, good-humoredly, reassuringly*). Of course, Mrs. Trent; you couldn't have had any interest in the missing papers?

(*Alice, nervous and anxious, makes no reply. A brief pause ensues.*)

COMMISSIONER (*his voice more businesslike; his gaze fixed sharply on Alice*). Had you?

ALICE (*rises; shrinks from Commissioner; turns to Trent*). What does he mean? I don't understand.

TRENT (*to Commissioner; good-naturedly*). Of course, she hadn't! They did not concern her in the least!

COMMISSIONER (*ignores Trent. To Alice, as before*). How about that, Mrs. Trent?

TRENT (*decidedly, but without anger*). Listen, Commissioner! Mrs. Trent had no interest in those papers . . . none whatever! She knows nothing about their disappearance . . . absolutely nothing!

(*A slight pause. Then Commissioner moves downstage and faces Alice directly.*)

COMMISSIONER (*insinuatingly*). Are you *sure* you don't, Mrs. Trent?

TRENT (*repressing his rising anger*). Hold on, Commissioner! Please don't forget that you're talking to my wife!

COMMISSIONER (*sarcastically*). That's all right! But don't you forget that I'm an officer of the law in the

presence of a crime! (*Sharply.*) Mrs. Trent, tell me! Just what was your interest . . . ?

(*Alice rises in alarm and crosses swiftly to a point below small round table. Trent quickly joins her and lays his arm about her.*)

TRENT (*forcibly*). Stop right there! I won't have my wife grilled by you or any other man!

COMMISSIONER (*satirically*). That's so? Well, you wouldn't stop me doin' my duty just because a member of your family was involved, would you?

TRENT (*starts toward Commissioner. Angrily; but tense, not boisterous*). I'll show you mighty quick what I'll do!

ALICE (*stepping between the two men, and holding up her hands*). Please! . . . Please!

COMMISSIONER (*comes close and faces Trent. Threateningly*). So! You'd obstruct justice, would you? . . . *you!* . . . the District Attorney!

(*The two men stand glaring at each other for a moment. Then Trent, with a gesture indicating defeat, turns and goes upstage. During the scene that follows, he stands in the background, his glance veering from one to the other, as question and answer pass back and forth between them.*)

COMMISSIONER (*ignoring Trent further; to Alice, in a slow, even voice*). Once more, Mrs. Trent! Did you have any interest in those papers, or not?

ALICE. You heard what my husband said just now, didn't you? . . . that they did not concern me in the least?

COMMISSIONER. Never mind what *your husband* said! What do *you* say?

(*Alice turns away, making no reply.*)

COMMISSIONER. What's the answer?

ALICE (*confused, hesitating*). No! . . . yes! . . . I mean . . .

COMMISSIONER. Well; what do you mean?

(*Alice, her back to Commissioner, keeps silent.*)

COMMISSIONER. Want *me* to tell you? You were afraid to have your husband use this evidence. I heard you say so when I came in here. That's why you lifted the papers from the safe . . . tried to suppress them!

ALICE (*much moved, turns and faces Commissioner*). I . . . ? I try to suppress them? I love my husband, Commissioner! Why should I seek to ruin him?

COMMISSIONER (*his cross-examination becomes sterner, more relentless. He never takes his eyes from Alice's*). Well; what was it then? You were the only person who could open the safe, because you were the only one, besides Trent, who knew the combination! You went into it for something! For what? . . . money?

TRENT (*taking a step forward. Tensely*). Look here . . . !

ALICE (*interrupting quickly*). If I did, what then? I put the money there, didn't I?

COMMISSIONER. But it wasn't yours!

ALICE (*simply, but forcibly*). That's true! But why should I have *robbed* the safe, when I'd have a perfect

right to take the money out of it . . . here and now . . . right before your very eyes? (*Turns away, with an irritating little laugh.*) Don't be absurd, Commissioner!

COMMISSIONER (*roughly, domineeringly*). See here! You've squirmed out of every question I've asked you so far! What I want to know, is this: Did you, or did you not, enter the safe to-night? Answer me, Yes, or No!

ALICE (*with spirit*). No! Most decidedly, No! Until just now, I haven't even been in this room to-day!

COMMISSIONER (*after a moment's reflection, to Trent, curtly*). I want to see your servants . . . first, the girl who opened the door for me!

(*Commissioner sits down in chair at left of table, his back to the others. Alice seats herself on davenport. Trent goes upstage, pushes wall-button on right of centre door, and then returns to right side of centre table. Idly he handles books lying thereon, and straightens books in book-rack, one of which is upside down. This done, he casually touches other articles on the table, and finally sits down in desk-chair at right thereof. As he does so, Maid enters through centre door, and halts just within doorway. Throughout the ensuing scene, she plays the quiet, respectful servant. Her eyes, however, veer constantly toward the book-rack.*)

MAID. Did you ring, Mr. Trent?

TRENT. Yes. The Commissioner wants you.

COMMISSIONER (*is facing left. Without turning, calls roughly*). Come here!

(*Maid comes down to a point between table and safe, to left of Commissioner.*)

COMMISSIONER (*as before*). What's your name?

MAID. Mary . . . Mary Evans, sir.

COMMISSIONER. Well, Mary Evans, did you see Mrs. Trent in this room around dinner time?

MAID. No, sir.

COMMISSIONER. Did you see anybody else?

MAID. No, sir . . . that is, nobody but Mr. Trent.

COMMISSIONER. Oh, *Mr.* Trent, was it? (*He glances swiftly over his shoulder at Trent.*) Where did he go when he left here? Did you notice?

MAID. To his room, I think, sir. (*Ingenuously.*) Didn't you, Mr. Trent?

COMMISSIONER (*swinging about in his chair and confronting Trent, who sits at his ease at the opposite side of the table, smoking*). What did you do in your room, Trent?

TRENT (*nonchalantly*). Guess!

COMMISSIONER (*nettled*). What did you go there for? To *hide* something?

TRENT (*as before*). Grilling *me* now, are you?

COMMISSIONER (*commandingly, after a slight pause during which he has eyed Trent searchingly*). Suppose we take a look at that room of yours?

TRENT. My room?

COMMISSIONER. Yes!

TRENT (*indifferently*). All right! Come along!

(*Trent and Commissioner exit in silence through centre door. Alice rises nervously, follows them a few paces up right, and halts. Maid goes a little way up left. A pause while both women stand facing door, keyed up with anxiety as to what is happening beyond it. At length, Maid crosses right to Alice.*)

MAID (*solicitously*). What's the matter, Mrs. Trent?

ALICE (*starts, lays her hand on Maid's arm and leads her downstage. In a tense, low voice*). Mary . . . are you sure . . . about Mr. Trent? Did he go to his room after he left this one?

MAID. Yes, ma'am!

ALICE (*in increasing anxiety and distress*). Did Mr. Trent . . . Did he carry . . . anything in his hand? He didn't, Mary . . . did he?

MAID. Yes, ma'am, he did! . . . something rolled up . . . like a piece of paper. I didn't take particular notice what it was.

(*Trent and Commissioner re-enter through centre door. Trent crosses right behind davenport, and stands leaning on the back of it. Alice leaves Maid, and waits expectant near round table. Maid retreats up right.*)

COMMISSIONER (*on entering; to Trent*). . . . Well; that will require some explanation. (*He comes down to lower end of table. To Alice.*) How much money did you have in the safe, Mrs. Trent?

ALICE (*reluctantly; faintly*). I think . . . let me see! . . . about twenty-five hundred dollars.

COMMISSIONER (*unrolls some bank-notes he carries in his hand, and holds them out to Alice. Impressively*). Here's that amount exactly . . . rolled up in a Red Cross circular! (*With the bills in one hand, and the japanned-tin box in the other.*) This is the stuff you had in this box in that safe, isn't it?

ALICE (*recoiling affrightedly*). Where did you find it?

COMMISSIONER. In your husband's room . . . hidden under the mattress of his bed!

ALICE (*sinking onto davenport and covering her face with her hands. Passionately*). No, no! I don't believe it! (*Trent comes around to right of davenport, and lays a comforting hand on her shoulder. Maid crosses to Alice swiftly.*)

MAID (*earnestly*). Oh, Mrs. Trent; I'm awfully sorry! If I'd only known . . .

COMMISSIONER (*to Maid; roughly*). Shut up, you!

(*Maid retreats up centre.*)

COMMISSIONER (*to Trent; sneeringly*). I got your number now, all right, Mr. District Attorney! Goin' to submit that evidence to the grand-jury to-morrow, were you? Rats! Fact is, when it came to a show-down, you got cold feet. And you faked this robbery to save your face. Then, you pinched the kale to make people believe some ordinary yegg had tapped the safe and swiped the papers too!

TRENT (*calmly*). Robbed myself, did I? Is that what you think?

COMMISSIONER. Yourself? Can that! Who collected this evidence, anyhow?

TRENT. Under my direction . . . the District Attorney's office.

COMMISSIONER. Who paid for doin' it?

TRENT. The City, I suppose.

COMMISSIONER. It did, all right! So it was not yourself you robbed, but the City. That's a felony! (*Starts toward Trent.*) And I arrest you for . . . !

ALICE (*springs from davenport, crosses toward Commissioner, and cuts in impetuously*). No! No! I did it!

TRENT (*in amazement*). You . . . ?

COMMISSIONER (*with a self-satisfied grin*). So! I was right in the first place. It was *you* who tapped the safe?

ALICE (*breathlessly*). Yes!

COMMISSIONER. To keep your husband out of trouble?

ALICE (*excitedly*). Yes! To-day I received an anonymous letter . . . threatening him. It said, if he did use this evidence . . . the gunmen! (*Covering her face with her hands; shuddering.*) Oh, I can't go on! (*She turns and takes a wavering step towards davenport, but is brought up short by the Commissioner's next line.*)

COMMISSIONER (*with the gratified air of one who has solved a difficult problem, and now merely wishes to clear up a few details*). But why did you plant the money in his room?

ALICE (*hesitatingly*). Why? Because . . . because . . . No, no! I didn't do that!

COMMISSIONER. Who did, then? How did it get there?

ALICE (*growing more and more confused and helpless*). I've no idea!

COMMISSIONER (*sarcastically*). Oh, the money just walked into Trent's room, and went to bed by itself! That's what happened, was it?

(*Alice, nervous and trembling, makes no reply.*)

COMMISSIONER (*domineeringly; threateningly*). Here! I'm tired of fooling! Come across! Come across, I tell you! Where are those papers?

(*Maid's glance is fixed on book-rack. Trent, as unobtrusively as possible, moves up to a point to right of and a little behind her.*)

ALICE (*breaking down entirely. Weakly, plaintively*). Why . . . I don't know! . . . I don't know where they are! (*Sinks despairingly onto davenport.*)

TRENT (*in quiet, unemotional tones*). I know where they were . . . a minute ago.

(*Maid glances swiftly over her shoulder at Trent, then at book-rack; and, before she can control herself, takes a hasty step towards it.*)

COMMISSIONER (*at lower left of table. Eagerly*). Where?

TRENT (*nodding towards book-rack*). There!

(*Alice rises. She and Commissioner stare at Trent. Maid's gaze is fixed on book-rack, and she shows signs of fright. A brief pause.*)

TRENT (*to Maid, sternly, but without pointing to book-rack*). Get me those papers!

(*Maid remains silent and motionless.*)

TRENT (*more forcibly*). Get me those papers!

(*Maid begins to go to pieces. Her face twitches; she works her hands nervously; her glance veers swiftly from one to another of those watching her.*)

MAID (*tremulously*). . . . Papers . . . ?

TRENT. Yes! The papers . . . you hid between those books . . . when you tried to make your get-away!

MAID (*as before*). What . . . books . . . ?

TRENT (*for the first time pointing to book-rack*). The books you've just been staring at! The books you've been watching every minute that you've been in this room!

MAID. . . . I . . . ?

(*Trent strides swiftly to right of table. Maid follows him anxiously as far as its upper end. Alice crosses quickly to a point at the right of, and downstage from Trent. Commissioner moves hastily to left side of table. All eyes are fixed on Trent.*)

TRENT (*scatters books neatly piled in book-rack, and seizes a jacket, stuffed with papers, hidden among them. He holds up the jacket for all to see*). Here are the papers! (*Negligently, he tosses the jacket onto the table again.*)

MAID (*forcibly, but respectfully*). Mr. Trent, I'm an honest woman! I didn't steal your papers! I had no idea where they were!

TRENT (*calmly; amusedly*). No? Why, you've given yourself dead away, Sadie!

MAID (*alarmed, flinches. Quaveringly*). Sadie . . . ? My name isn't Sadie!

TRENT (*pulling from his pocket a photograph, with writing on the back of it, and holding it out to Maid*). It isn't? Sure? Well, here's a picture and description of "Combination Sadie," the wisest little safe-worker in the country! . . . and they both fit you to a dot!

ALICE (*taking a step nearer. In stupefaction*). Mary! . . . you? (*A slight pause.*) Oh, now I see! You took the papers from the safe, and put the money in my husband's room to cast suspicion on him!

TRENT (*reading from back of photograph*). "Combination Sadie" has a scar on her right shoulder from a healed bullet wound. It's shaped like a three-pointed star. . . .

(*Trent advances toward Maid, as if about to examine her shoulder. She, in alarm, grasps her waist at neck, and retreats up left before him. He stops his pursuit and turns to the others.*)

TRENT (*laughingly*). See! She's given herself away again!

COMMISSIONER (*to Trent, roughly*). Hold on! What are you after? Your wife's already confessed.

TRENT (*moves, right, to Alice, and lays an affectionate arm about her*). That's right! She did. But it was to a crime she'd never committed. She was trying to shield me. That's the kind of a little wife she is! (*Commandingly; pointing to Maid.*) Commissioner, now that you

have a duty to do, do it! I charge that crook with burglarizing my safe! Telephone for an officer!

(*Commissioner neither moves, nor speaks.*)

TRENT (*more strongly*). Telephone for an officer!

(*Commissioner slowly and reluctantly crosses to table. Only after further hesitation and delay does he take up instrument. Finally, he speaks into telephone in a low voice from which all the brag and bluster have vanished.*)

COMMISSIONER. Spring . . . six-thousand . . .

MAID (*dashes at Commissioner. Snatches telephone from his hands and flings it violently to the floor. Furiously.*) Don't you dare to double-cross me! Who got me the job in this house? Who put me here to pinch all the evidence against those grafters I could lay my hands on? It was you . . . damn you! . . . the rottenest grafter in the bunch!

(*Commissioner advances as if to strike Maid.*)

TRENT (*mockingly*). That's just what I've been waiting for! . . . The last fact I needed!

(*Commissioner puts his right hand to his hip as if about to draw a gun, and with his left reaches out to grab the jacket of papers lying on the table.*)

TRENT (*as before*). That's all right! You can have those! The *real* evidence is safe in my vault downtown! (*He lifts jacket from table and hands it to Commissioner.*) Here's what you got! Look! A lot of waste-paper!

(*Commissioner snatches jacket, opens it, and stands dumfounded, staring at its contents, while some of the*

scraps of newspaper with which it is stuffed flutter to the floor. He crushes the jacket in his fist and slams it down furiously.)

COMMISSIONER. Well, I'll be . . . !

QUICK CURTAIN

THE LAST STRAW

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

BY

ALLENA HARRIS

CHARACTERS

PROFESSOR MINEER: *A lovable, absent-minded old fellow, teacher and authority on the English language at the local college.*

SYBIL MINEER: *His attractive young daughter and the delight of his life.*

WALTER GATES: *One of his students in love with Sybil.*

SMILIN' SAM: *A grinning half-wit.*

SCENE: *The living-room of the small cottage home of Professor Mineer.*

A door that enters directly from the front porch is at the rear left. To the rear right a small window, with a cushioned window seat beneath it.

To the right front a shabby large upholstered davenport, a small table at down-stage end strewn with books.

A library table to the left with lamp and telephone — and more books. An arm chair at right of table, and a smaller one near by towards front.

A door to right side rear opening into dining room and kitchen. Bookcases to right front.

Gay chintzes hang at the window. The room has a distinctly bookish feeling. The professor's new felt hat hangs on peg to left of door.

TIME: *Four o'clock of a mid-October afternoon.*

The room is unoccupied when the curtain is raised. After a short pause, Professor Mineer enters.

THE LAST STRAW

ENTER MINEER (*His tweed suit is slightly worn and in need of pressing. A knocked-about old straw hat tops his head. He wears a pair of horn-rimmed glasses and his black bow tie is loose and crooked. We are at once impressed by his lack of interest in his appearance, which is overshadowed by his delightful air of preoccupation and gentility*).

(*He enters quickly and slightly out of breath, closing the door firmly behind him, then stands for a moment listening for someone outside. Seems satisfied that no one has followed him, crosses to small table at right and fumbles around for a very old looking book. Finds it, opens it with great care and sighs. He is suddenly attracted by a scratching noise outside and holding the book closely to him tip-toes to window and peers out towards front doorsteps*).

MINEER (*Ha! Just as he thought! Smilin' Sam is sitting on his door steps. He snaps his fingers and motions to him to leave*). Go home! Get away from here, you grinning idiot! Why do you keep following me, eh? Answer me! You're not as stupid as you pretend. Get away, I tell you, or I'll call the police — the police! (*Turns away in agitation and crosses to telephone.*) I will —

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damn it all — I can't tolerate this another hour — following me all over town — trying to make an ass of me — it's disgraceful! (*Looks in book for number.*) Hello! Hello! Give me Warren 768 — Eh? Warren 768 — the police station — (*glances at window*). I'll teach him to respect his superiors — (*his glance falls on book he has laid on table — starts — changes his mind*). Police station — oh — er — never mind — I just wanted to know if you were there — no — no — never mind. (*Picks up book, scratches his head in perplexity, replaces it carefully among the other books — calls.*) Sybil! Sybil — where are you?

SYBIL. (*answers from room to right*). Oh — oo — oo! (*Enters.*), Lo pops! Oh, dad! Look what's on your head!

MINEER (*reaches up and finds his hat — looks at it guiltily — tries to hide it*). Oh — my — hat —

SYBIL. That ridiculous old straw hat again! Didn't I tell you to wear your soft hat today? And there it is hanging on the peg.

MINEER. Yes — so it is.

SYBIL. And here it is almost November.

MINEER. But it's still too warm for a felt. Please don't bother me about that now. I'm all tired out — and nervous as an old woman.

SYBIL (*quickly changes from her air of severity to one of sympathy*). I know you are. It's because you're working too hard rounding up those dumb little freshies. You're losing your pep before the term's hardly begun.

MINEER. No — no — that's not it.

SYBIL. Yes it is. Now, sit down here while I make the tea and stick the little cloves in the lemon. (*Places him comfortably in the arm chair — straightens his tie.*) There! How's that?

MINEER (*sighs*). My dear child — what would I do without you?

SYBIL (*gives him a little squeeze*). You poor old thing, you wouldn't do at all. Now, here's a conundrum for you. Think hard! Something warm on a plate, covered with a snow white blanket, piled high in the middle — color of a pickaninny — guess.

MINEER (*sniffs the air*). Gingerbread.

SYBIL. No fair — you sniffed it. You're just a regular gingerbread hound — and because you're such a bright old doggie, I'll put gobs of butter on it.

MINEER. Ah — Ha! Mind the butter, little housekeeper.

SYBIL (*crosses to right*). Don't worry — I will. We'll pretend we have to mind our calories.

MINEER. Yes — (*glances at watch*). By the way, I'm expecting Mr. Gates at four.

SYBIL (*delighted*). Walter coming to tea!

MINEER. It's not a social call exactly.

SYBIL. No? Then what?

MINEER. He's coming to discuss a paper on the split infinitive.

SYBIL. Split — ! Oh, Dad, you simply slay me!

MINEER. Sybil — please —

SYBIL. But split infinitive! After school hours! It knocks me coo-coo!

MINEER. Tch! Tch! To listen to your language, my child, one would indeed doubt that you are the offspring of a teacher of English — if I do say so myself, an authority on English.

SYBIL. Oh shoot the King's English.

MINEER (*shocked*). Why, Sybil!

SYBIL. I mean it. I get fed up on English.

MINEER (*assumes a classroom attitude*). But pure English, my child —

SYBIL. I hate pure English, or anything that's pure.

MINEER. Oh my! If your mother were only here.

SYBIL. I'll bet she used to spout off some of that ancient slang herself.

MINEER. Never! Never!

SYBIL. Oh well, she'd understand, all right. I mean a hundred percent pure. I just love things that are a little bit off — oh, just a smidge. All women are that way.

MINEER. My stars! What do you know about women. You're just a child.

SYBIL. Call eighteen a child?

MINEER. Certainly. Wait till the figures are reversed and you are eighty-one. Then you'll begin to feel that you don't know much about the psychology of women after all. Well, let it go — but mind your English while Mr. Gates is here — he is one of my star pupils.

SYBIL. Don't worry. Your star pupil and I speak the same language.

MINEER. Oh, go make the tea!

SYBIL. All right (*crosses to door*) —

MINEER. Oh, Sybil — (*tries to speak nonchalantly — takes out a cigarette and lights it*).

SYBIL. Yes?

MINEER. Look out of the window and see if he is coming.

SYBIL. Who — Walter?

MINEER. Yes.

SYBIL. Now, *that's* a strange idea!

MINEER. Not at all. I would like to know how much time I have for myself.

SYBIL (*looks at him suspiciously — then decides to humor him*). Oh well. (*Crosses to window — looks up and down the street.*) No — no — I don't see him.

MINEER (*flicks the ashes from his cigarette*). See anyone at all?

SYBIL. No —

MINEER. Put your head out a little further.

SYBIL (*kneels on seat — thrusts her head way out — throwing her little high-heeled slippers discreetly in the air — cranes her neck both ways*). No — (*discovers Smilin' Sam*). Well, for the love of Pete — what are *you* doing there? (*Puts her finger to her lips and shakes her head at Sam showing that they are in league — then*

turns to her father.) Who do you suppose is parked right out there on our front porch?

MINEER (*innocently*). Really? Is there someone on the front porch?

SYBIL. Smilin' Sam!

MINEER. You don't mean it! Well, ask him why he's — he's — what did you say?

SYBIL. Parked. Say, Sam what are you doing down there? Is your machine stalled?

MINEER (*pleased*). Parked — stalled — automobile phraseology — good! She's holding to her simile. Well, what's he stalled there for?

SYBIL. He doesn't answer — just smiles and smiles — like a day in June.

MINEER (*disgusted*). Grins and grins — like a gargoyle.

SYBIL (*bobbing her head in and out of the window as she speaks — first to Sam then to her father*). What's the matter Sam? Want to come in? No? Want something? You do? He shook his head " yes," daddy.

MINEER (*scowls*). Ask him if he wants something to eat.

SYBIL. Want something to eat, Sam — some nice fresh gingerbread? No?

MINEER. Or to drink —

SYBIL. Want a little hootch, Sam?

MINEER. Sybil! The neighbors! They might take it seriously.

SYBIL. If they did, they'd all come dashing over. Oh,

Sam, don't you know what you want — nor what you came for? Oh, you do? Well, come in and get it!

MINEER (*frightened — rises*). Oh — no — no — he — he might steal something — (*glances at his precious book*). Don't let him in.

SYBIL. Steal something!

MINEER. Not valuables, of course. I — I was thinking of my books.

SYBIL. Your books! (*Laughs*). Oh, dear, dear, you *are* funny! Why, Smilin' Sam doesn't know what a book is — (*out of window*) Do you Sam? Did you ever hear of a book?

MINEER (*breathlessly*). What did he say?

SYBIL. Nothing — of course — just sits there and smiles.

MINEER. The simpleton! Well, give it up and run make the tea. We can't put intelligence where God forgot it.

SYBIL. Oh, I wouldn't say that. God hasn't forgotten anything. There's a perfectly good reason for Sam being the way he is — and — for his squatting out there on our porch at this particular moment.

MINEER. Well, in heaven's name, what is it?

SYBIL. I don't know — but he has something on his weak little mind and he's going to stay there till he gets it off. That's the way he always behaves. You haven't committed a crime, have you, daddy?

MINEER. Crime! Why — why — what do you mean?

SYBIL (*moves about room, pretending to straighten it, while Mineer follows her about anxiously, stumbling over chair in his eagerness to catch every word of the story*). Well — I was just wondering. You've heard the yarn about Sam, haven't you — and the case of old man Lawton?

MINEER. Lawton — Lawton — never heard of the man in my life.

SYBIL. You must have. But, of course, it wouldn't register with you.

MINEER. What wouldn't — er — register with me — what are you driving at?

SYBIL. Nothing. I was just thinking about that story of Smilin' Sam. I'll make the tea — (*crosses*).

MINEER. Come back here. What's this story you're mumbling about — out with it!

SYBIL. It isn't important, really — there couldn't possibly be any connection — I don't know why I thought of it — but — it seems this same Smilin' Sam — parked out there on our doorsteps —

MINEER. Yes — yes —

SYBIL. Followed old man Lawton around town for days and days and just smiled and smiled — as he is doing now —

MINEER. Yes — yes — and then what happened?

SYBIL. Smiled and smiled until poor Mr. Lawton was almost a nervous wreck —

MINEER (*takes his handkerchief and wipes his brow*). Well, naturally — who wouldn't be?

SYBIL. Yes — who wouldn't be?

MINEER. Yes — of course. Well, then what?

SYBIL. Till finally old Lawton succumbed.

MINEER. Succumbed —

SYBIL. Or gave up the chase — at least his end of it — he being the "chasee," you see — not the chaser —

MINEER. I see —

SYBIL. AND — went to the police — and confessed that he had MURDERED his wife.

MINEER. Horrible — ghastly — (*quickly changes*) — er — I mean ridiculous.

SYBIL. But true. Ask anyone who lived here at that time.

MINEER. But why should I! What possible connection could there be between a man murdering his wife — and that thing out there — and us!

SYBIL. That's what I say! I don't know why I even thought of it. But if he's annoying you, daddy, I'll send him away.

MINEER. Doesn't annoy me in the least. But he has his nerve sitting out there like that — for the whole town to see.

SYBIL (*crosses to window — speaks sharply and claps her hands*). Go away Sam, I mean it — we don't want you here another minute! Go on!

MINEER. Tell him we'll call the dogs.

SYBIL. We haven't any dogs.

MINEER. Ssshs! We'll pretend. (*Raises his voice — calls and whistles.*) Here Caesar! Here Shakespeare! Here Lowell!

SYBIL. Now what's the use of calling up all those dead scholars? Sam isn't afraid of dogs — they all love him and he knows it — he just sits there and smiles.

MINEER. I'll kick him off bodily —

SYBIL. Wouldn't do any good — he'd come right back again. Just sit right down and read your book calmly and forget him — I'll make the tea — (*crosses*) because *my* conscience is clear anyway. (*Exits.*)

MINEER (*exasperated*). Impudent child! (*Thinks a moment — snaps his fingers with determination.*) I *will* kick him off those steps! (*Crosses to carry out threat, swings open the door. Walter Gates is revealed standing on the porch looking right at the still invisible Sam.*)

MINEER (*taken by surprise*). Oh — er — Gates — how do you do! (*Forces a smile.*)

GATES (*a clean-cut, good-looking youth, dressed in the latest college cut, with a new fall hat on his head*). How do you do, sir. What's Smilin' Sam doing here?

MINEER. I'm sure I don't know. Come in.

GATES. Well, what I want to know is, did he follow you or is he waiting for me?

MINEER. I wouldn't be at all surprised?

GATES. Which way?

MINEER. If he had followed you.

GATES (*entering — removes his hat*). Do you know what that implies, professor?

MINEER. Nothing at all. I thought it was rather a good one.

GATES. It is — if it's true. Let me see, how long have you been here — I mean lived in this town?

MINEER (*looks at him suspiciously*). Three years.

GATES. Oh yes, well, that accounts for it. You see, Professor, several years ago Smilin' Sam followed one of our most esteemed citizens about for a week or two — everywhere he went — a man named Lawton —

MINEER. Yes — yes — we haven't any time to waste on small town gossip. Did you bring your notes on the split infinitive?

GATES (*produces notes*). Yes sir, here they are. But you really would be interested in the story about Smilin' Sam.

MINEER. No — no — I'm never interested in these irrational stupids. Their thoughts are muddled. They can't round a perfect sentence — nor decline a verb — they don't know a preposition from a pronoun —

GATES. But as a matter of psychology —

MINEER. Psychology, bosh! There's too much said about it nowadays. Your head is either clear or it isn't — that's my contention. Let me hear a man's figure of speech and I'll tell you what he is. (*During this speech Walter wanders to window and looks out, taking no heed of the professor's remarks. Mineer does not notice Walter.*) Take this split infinitive, for instance. I hate

it with all my soul and yet some of our ablest writers used it in the past — and still do —

GATES (*speaks to Sam through window*). What are you up to, Sam? Something on your bean, old boy? Got some dope about somebody? You have? Gee whiz! Somebody in this house? You don't mean it! Great guns!

MINEER (*notices Walter*). Are you going to discuss this split infinitive, or are you not?

GATES. Who can talk about a split infinitive with a cracked nut sitting on the doorsteps!

MINEER. *I* can.

GATES. But if you knew the story about him — and he says he's got something on us — it's curious — (*out of window*) — Say, Sam, wait a minute, will you? I'll be right out. (*Starts towards door.*)

MINEER (*interferes*). For Lord's sake, keep your head, Gates. Stay away from that window and let the fool sit there. Try to concentrate — as I do. Do you think for a moment I'm upset about a simpleton like that sitting on my doorsteps? Not at all! Let the whole town see him — I don't care. Bah — would any jury take his word against mine? Would it?

GATES (*astonished*). Jury! Who in — who said anything about a jury?

MINEER. You said something about evidence.

GATES. I said he had something on us.

MINEER. Same thing. I tell you I don't care what he has — or what he knows — not a fig — not a damn. He's only a half-cracked thing anyway, and I'm a pro-

fessor of English. Why, hell, Gates, it's silly to talk about it.

GATES. Control yourself, Professor. Why are you so wrought up? I merely mentioned that it was curious. Under the circumstances you admit it's curious, don't you?

MINEER. Admit nothing! I tell you my conscience is clear. If he knows anything about anybody it's not about me, do you hear?

GATES (*astonished at Mineer's violence, backs away*). Why — I — believe you — I certainly do. But I never heard you use such strong language before — I'm surprised.

MINEER. Surprised, eh? Well, you'll be more surprised when you see what I'm going to do. I'm going out and kick that imbecile off my porch if it's the last thing I do! (*Crosses angrily to door — swings it wide open and steps out. His voice is heard from outside very much excited.*) Get out of here — go on — get out of here — there — damn you! Think you can follow me around the town and make an ass of me! I'll show you! Get out and don't you ever come back again! (*His voice trails away as if chasing Smilin' Sam down the walk.*) (*Walter stands amazed.*)

SYBIL (*enters right with tea things*). Hello, Walter!

GATES. Hello, Sybil — (*crosses to her and takes tray which he places on table left*). Say, what's the matter with the old man?

SYBIL. Where is he?

GATES. Out there. He's all up in the air. I merely let

drop the little remark that it was funny to see Smilin' Sam sitting out there — and he blew up — kicked him off the porch — whew! here he comes now —

ENTER MINEER (*gasping for breath and mopping his face with his handkerchief*).

SYBIL (*softly*). What's the trouble, daddy?

MINEER (*dropping down on davenport*). I — kicked him out of the yard.

SYBIL. Good for you. I think you did the right thing. (*Sits in large arm chair and pours tea.*) Now, we can all settle down to a nice quiet little chat over our tea-cups. Two lumps as usual, daddy?

MINEER. Yes — no — Oh I don't care.

SYBIL (*puts in two lumps — hands the cup to Walter, who passes it to the ruffled professor*). One — two — Lemon in your tea, Walter?

GATES. No thanks — I take mine straight.

SYBIL. Oh — you wicked boy.

GATES. *I'm* not wicked.

MINEER. What do you mean by that inference, sir!

GATES. Inference?

SYBIL (*soothingly*). Why, that wasn't an inference, daddy. That was repartee.

MINEER (*barely sips his tea*). Humph! Queer repartee.

SYBIL. Gingerbread, Walter?

GATES. Thanks — (*close to Sybil — in a low voice*) — Who's my gingerbread girl?

MINEER (*sharply*). Pardon me?

GATES. I was remarking how wonderfully light this gingerbread is — like a zephyr.

MINEER. Humph!

SYBIL. Thank you, Walter. I made it myself — especially for daddy — (*gives the plate to Walter, who passes it to Mineer*).

MINEER. No thanks.

GATES. No gingerbread?

MINEER (*shortly*). No.

SYBIL. But, daddy, I put gobs of butter on it.

MINEER. I don't care for any. (*Sybil and Walter exchange glances — puzzled, surprised.*)

SYBIL. Don't you feel well, dear?

MINEER. Never felt better in my life.

GATES (*returns plate to table — speaks to Sybil*). Ah — perhaps I'd better come some other time to discuss the paper.

MINEER. Certainly not. (*Rises.*)

SYBIL. Is it — is it Smilin' Sam, dear?

MINEER (*replaces cup on tray*). Would you mind not mentioning that name again?

GATES (*crosses to right*). You see, Sybil? I merely mentioned that it was curious — and —

MINEER. And would *you* mind not using that word again! It's insinuating! It's insolent — It's — It's —

(*Smilin' Sam's face appears at the window — a silly, stupid harmless lad of perhaps twenty. He grins, points his finger at Mineer — then ducks below the sill*). Oh!

(*They all look towards window.*)

SYBIL. Daddy, dearest — what is it? Has it gone too far?

MINEER. Yes — yes — it's gone too far.

GATES (*crossing to door*). I'll choke him —

MINEER. No — Gates, don't go. I'll give up — I'll tell you — I can't hold out against a thing like that. He's got me — he's got me — just as he got old man Lawton.

SYBIL. Whatever are you talking about!

GATES. Look here, Professor, you're letting your imagination get the best of you.

MINEER. No — it's not imagination — he's followed me for three days — everywhere I've gone —

SYBIL. Oh, I'm sorry —

MINEER. Always grinning — and pointing his finger at me — just as he did now. He must have seen me when I did it — but I'll give it back.

SYBIL. Give what back?

GATES. What are you talking about?

MINEER. Old Blodgett's book —

SYBIL. Old Blodgett's book?

GATES. Old Blodgett's book!

MINEER. I'm a thief.

SYBIL. Thief! You're out of your mind.

GATES. He's been over-working.

MINEER. No — I know just what I'm saying. I'm a a thief in every sense of the word. You know old Blodgett, don't you, Gates?

GATES. Why, of course — our multi-millionaire.

MINEER. And you know his library?

GATES. Certainly. One of the best in the country.

SYBIL (*genuinely distressed now*). Oh, daddy — this has gone too far.

MINEER. Wait a minute — (*crosses to right — extracts the same book he handled earlier in the scene*). Here it is — a rare one — first edition of Chaucer — think of it, Gates — *first* edition of Chaucer —

SYBIL. But you didn't steal it, daddy?

MINEER. I didn't mean to — but you know how queer old Blodgett is, don't you, Gates?

GATES. I know. He wouldn't let the Holy Spirit take one out on oath.

SYBIL. And he doesn't understand or appreciate his old books, anyway!

MINEER. And God knows, I do. (*Handles the book reverently — almost weeps.*) I wanted to ponder and gloat over this one — I wanted to have it all to myself — to live with it a few days — to read it nights — to sleep with it under my pillow — so a few days ago — when he allowed me to look at them in his home — I smuggled it out under my coat — like this — (*crosses*

to them — shows them the book) — and here it is — think of it, Gates, the first edition of Chaucer —

SYBIL. How many days ago was that?

MINEER. Just four. The next day this grinning Sam started following me — he must have known — and I've nearly lost my mind — poor old Lawton. But I'll take it back — this very night. He can send me to prison if he wants to.

SYBIL. Prison — Oh no —

GATES. Perhaps the old duffer hasn't missed it yet. I'll tell you what — I'll go with you. You engage the old codger in conversation, see, and I'll just browse around the library and sneak it back on the shelf when he isn't looking.

SYBIL. Oh Walter, that's so sweet of you!

GATES. I'd do anything for you, Sybil — and, of course — your father.

(*Voices are heard outside as of a small crowd.*)

GATES. What's that? (*They all listen — Walter crosses to window.*) Why, there's a crowd out there.

MINEER. A crowd!

SYBIL (*runs to Walter's side*). They're asking him questions.

GATES. And the poor fool is pointing to this house.

MINEER (*stands rooted in terror near the table*). Grinning and pointing at me!

GATES. Well, come on — let's sail right through the mob and be about our business, as old Shake said.

SYBIL. Oh no, don't go now — this is all my fault —

GATES (*putting on his hat*). Yes — let's go — and get it over with. What's the use of letting the crowd swell.

MINEER (*reaches for his old straw hat*). You're right, Gates.

SYBIL. Oh, daddy — please — please don't wear that old straw again — please — (*desperately*). See how nice Walter looks in his felt —

MINEER. Tomorrow, dear — tomorrow —I feel better in this one — (*kisses her*) — Now, don't worry, little girl — this is the only thing for your bad old father to do.

SYBIL. But you mustn't wear that hat — it isn't safe — daddy —

(*Mineer and Gates pass out the door.*)

GATES (*calling back*). We'll be back in a few minutes! (*As the door opens the voices are heard more distinctly — when the door closes, they soften — Sybil drops to the davenport and covers her face with her hands — weeping softly.*)

MINEER (*his voice is heard above the others from outside*). Here! Here! What the devil do you mean! Come back here with that — Sam! Well of all the fools! Hey — you — bring that back — D'ye hear me — bring it back!

(*Sybil runs to window and peeps out.*)

SYBIL. Oh! Oh! how terrible!

GATES (*steps back into room*). Can you beat it, Sybil! That jibbering imp snatched the old man's hat off his head and is running around acting like a loon.

MINEER (*follows Gates into room*). It's no use — he won't give it up — the absurdity of it! The asininity of it! Now I've got to wear this brand new thing that I'm utterly unacquainted with —

SYBIL. I told you it wasn't safe to wear that straw any longer — but you just wouldn't give it up — and I — (*Sam's face again appears at the window. He grins and holds up the old hat in one hand — extending his other arm through the curtains, his palm upturned*).

GATES. Now, what the — (*Sybil looks guiltily at her father, but without a word, takes a small coin purse from her pocket, extracts a half dollar and crosses to Sam, placing the coin in his palm. Sam grins and disappears*).

MINEER. Sybil, come here! (*Sybil crosses to him.*) Explain the meaning of all this — this mysterious business.

GATES. I'll tell the world it's mysterious.

SYBIL. It was the only way I could get it off of you.

MINEER (*severely*). Be more explicit!

SYBIL. Your hat.

MINEER. My hat?

SYBIL. Yes — that awful old hat. It was such a disgrace — it's been THE LAST STRAW in town for weeks and weeks — but you just would wear it — no matter what I said — and I — I promised Smilin' Sam fifty cents if he'd get it for me — and — and — he did — and — I'm so sorry, daddy —

MINEER (*looks at Sybil — looks at Gates — looks to Heaven — it is too much for him — takes off his felt*

hat and throws it furiously across the room — swings out of door rear).

GATES. Well, Sybil — you take the first prize. You put one over on the old man that time — (*Sybil crosses to davenport and sinks down dejectedly*). Gee, but you're clever. How did you ever think of it?

SYBIL. Oh, I didn't think it would go so far. I wouldn't have worried him for anything — honestly, Walter. I thought it would be a joke — but you see, he has worried himself sick — I wish I — (*begins to cry*) — I wish I had let him wear his old straw hat all winter!

GATES (*sits down beside her*). There — honey girl — don't you cry. It — it — well — it makes me feel rotten — don't — (*tries to soothe her in embarrassed, schoolboy manner*). I wish you wouldn't — I think it was awfully clever of you — I do — I think — Oh Sybil — sweetheart — I'm crazy about you. You know it, don't you? You know I love you don't you? Everybody else does.

SYBIL (*forgets her tears and snuggles up to him*). And everybody knows I love you, too.

(*The door opens cautiously and Professor Mineer enters — his old straw hat again on his head.*)

MINEER. Well, Gates, are you ready to go with me now?

SYBIL. Daddy! That hat!

MINEER (*takes off hat, blows an imaginary bit of dust off it and replaces it carefully*). It cost me fifty cents to get it back again!

(*Sybil sinks back in hopeless resignation.*)

CURTAIN

THANK YOU, DOCTOR

BY

GILBERT EMERY

CHARACTERS

DENNY CORT
MRS. LESTER
DOCTOR GURNEY
LUCILE GRAY
GEORGE HOUSTON

SCENE: *Reception room in a Doctor's office.*

TIME: *The present.*

THANK YOU, DOCTOR

The scene is the reception room of Dr. Gurney's office at ten o'clock in the morning. It is furnished comfortably but formally. Books, magazines, etc., are scattered about for the comfort of the waiting patients.

The stage is empty as the curtain rises. Presently the nurse enters from the dressing-room, adjusting her costume, to show that her day's work is beginning. She begins looking through her appointment book. The doorbell rings. She opens the door, and stands above it. Mrs. Lester enters.

MRS. LESTER. Good morning. I want to see Dr. Gurney, if I may. This is his consulting hour, isn't it?

NURSE GRAY. Yes, madam. At ten.

MRS. LESTER. I am Mrs. Norman Lester.

NURSE GRAY. Yes, you want —

MRS. LESTER. Oh, I don't want to see the Doctor for myself. It's about someone else.

NURSE GRAY. Oh yes. Dr. Gurney is disengaged just now. I'll ask him if he will see you.

MRS. LESTER. Yes, do — if he'll give me just a moment.

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NURSE GRAY (*knocks at door. When her back is turned, Mrs. Lester wheels quickly to the window, parting the curtains to look out*). Dr. Gurney!

DOCTOR (*off stage*). Come in.

NURSE GRAY (*opening the door, and speaking off stage*). A lady, sir. She wishes to see you for a moment.

DOCTOR (*off stage*). Very well.

NURSE GRAY. Doctor Gurney will see you in just a moment.

MRS. LESTER. Oh, thank you. (*Turns again to window slyly.*)

DOCTOR (*enters*). Good morning.

MRS. LESTER. You are Dr. Gurney?

DOCTOR. Yes. You wished to see me?

MRS. LESTER. Yes, to see you. But it is not for me. It is for my brother.

DOCTOR. Will you be seated? (*Offering chair.*)

MRS. LESTER. Thank you. You do not know me. I don't live in the city. I am Mrs. Lester — Mrs. Norman Lester. I was sent here to you — of course everyone in the world knows the great brain specialist, Dr. Gurney.

DOCTOR (*quietly*). Thank you. You wished to speak to me about your brother, you said.

MRS. LESTER. Yes, my brother — I want him to see you, to consult you.

DOCTOR. I see. What are the circumstances of your brother's case, Mrs. Lester? Could you — ?

MRS. LESTER (*emotionally and rapidly*). Let me explain. That is why I came myself, to explain. Oh, it is so terrible for me! You see he — my brother — (*Looks nervously at Nurse Gray and then at Doctor.*)

DOCTOR (*assuringly*). It's quite all right, Miss Gray is my assistant.

MRS. LESTER (*relieved*). Oh! — Well, he has an idea that — that he — well — that his mind is deranged. The slightest suggestion of that sort to him and he simply flies all to pieces.

DOCTOR. Not an uncommon symptom.

MRS. LESTER. Yes — and he *is* sane — Sane on every subject except one.

DOCTOR. And that one is — ?

MRS. LESTER (*rises, wringing her hands*). Oh, it is too distressing for me. He seems to believe at times that someone has stolen a valuable pearl necklace from him — he gets perfectly beside himself over the notion. Otherwise he's as normal as anyone could be.

DOCTOR. How old is he?

MRS. LESTER. He is a young chap. You see — he was at college but he overworked — he's very serious minded, much too serious — and they sent him home from school — to my mother — last month. At first she didn't realize his state — and then she got horribly frightened and telegraphed for me, so I could come. (*Tearfully.*) It's almost broken my heart.

DOCTOR. This notion that comes on him — is it only at intervals?

MRS. LESTER. Yes, and — once — he's been — violent.

DOCTOR. I see — Psycho-neurosis!

MRS. LESTER. Oh, Doctor, he's very dear to me and to my mother. He's all we have. If you could only *do* something.

DOCTOR. Send him to me, Mrs. Lester. I'll examine him. (*Turns away from her as if to go into his office.*)

MRS. LESTER. Oh, there it is! There's the difficulty. It is so hard to deal with him, especially in his bad days. This is one of his bad days. But I got him to promise to come to see you this morning.

DOCTOR. Good!

MRS. LESTER. You see, I told him *you'd* help him find his pearl necklace —

DOCTOR. Find his pearl necklace?

MRS. LESTER. Yes, the one he imagines he's lost, you see I said — forgive me — that you found things for people, that they had lost.

DOCTOR (*smiling*). Well, it is true that I am sometimes able to find *minds* for people — minds astray or lost.

MRS. LESTER. Oh, how wonderful! Only my brother mustn't find me here, I had better go. (*She begins adjusting her wrap.*) He'd be frightfully upset if he saw me — furious. Oh, Doctor, help him — save him!

DOCTOR. I'll see him when he comes, and if there *is* help for him, certainly I'll do all I can.

MRS. LESTER. Oh, thank you, Doctor. Thank you.

DOCTOR (*to nurse*). Nurse, make a note of the case. (*To Mrs. Lester.*) Your brother's name is — ?

MRS. LESTER (*speaks effusively to drown the last question*). Oh, thank you — thank you, Doctor. And after you've seen him, I'll come back to hear your decision, if I may?

DOCTOR. Certainly.

MRS. LESTER. I'd better go now. My brother mustn't, absolutely mustn't find me here. (*Door-bell rings. Mrs. Lester stops suddenly at door then turns quickly and speaks excitedly.*) Oh, dear! That may be my brother now. Nurse, is there another way out of this room?

NURSE GRAY. No, Madam — at least —

MRS. LESTER (*indicating another door*). That door there — where does that lead to?

DOCTOR (*pushes her past him*). To the dressing-room, Mrs. Lester.

PATIENT (*nurse opens door, then backs behind table, frightened. Patient enters, going through mysterious movements. He speaks in loud whisper to Nurse*). Is this his office?

NURSE GRAY. Whose?

PATIENT. Wheels — sky-rockets — Thunderbolts! ! ! (*He wheels in violent action.*)

DOCTOR. My good man, what is it?

PATIENT. Who are you?

DOCTOR. I am Doctor Gurney.

PATIENT (*he makes a quick angular gesture*). Cabbages! —I thought so — red hot brussels sprouts!

DOCTOR (*puts his hand on his shoulder*). My man — will you please —

PATIENT. No! No! (*Quickly throws Doctor's hand off and dodges below him. Then quickly faces the Doctor in an angry mood. Both women give a little cry.*) So-o-o! You ate fish on Friday! But it doesn't matter. (*He dismisses the Doctor with a gesture and turns, which brings him face to face with Mrs. Lester. He gives her a quick look.*) Apple sauce! (*He breaks into a silly giggle, and begins bobbing up and down, playing hide-and-seek with her over the top of the chair. She almost faints.*)

DOCTOR. My dear fellow, is there anything —

PATIENT (*wheels quickly and dodges him again. The Nurse screams and exits, slamming door as he passes. She sticks her head out a moment later. The patient faces around, laughing in a high pitched, shrill voice, and sawing one forefinger across the other in a teasing manner*). You never touched me! (*Then he suddenly looks mysteriously about.*) Sh! I'll be back later — later. Sh! (*He tiptoes to the door, opens it, looks out, then faces back.*) If I should return in my absence, please detain me until I get back. (*Quickly exits.*)

NURSE GRAY. *There's* one for you!

MRS. LESTER (*almost collapsing*). Oh, dear! Oh, dear!

DOCTOR. Don't be alarmed, Mrs. Lester. That happens quite frequently.

MRS. LESTER. Oh, it's awful!

DOCTOR. And don't be discouraged. Come in today at one thirty and I'll give you my opinion of your brother's case. Good morning.

MRS. LESTER. Thank you, Doctor — I shall be eternally grateful to you if you will undertake the case.

DOCTOR. I certainly will. At one thirty, Mrs. Lester.

MRS. LESTER. Oh thank you — thank you, Doctor. (*Doctor nods and exits. Mrs. Lester turns to Nurse Gray.*) He *is* a very great specialist, isn't he? They say he is never mistaken. (*Looks out of window nervously.*)

NURSE GRAY. He is one of the *greatest*. If anyone can help your brother, he can.

MRS. LESTER. If anyone can — I wonder — my poor brother.

DOCTOR (*appearing at door*). Nurse, come in a moment. I want you to prepare some of these specimens.

NURSE GRAY. Yes, sir. (*Exits.*)

MRS. LESTER. Then I'll be going. I'll be back at one thirty, Doctor.

DOCTOR. At one thirty. Good morning. (*Doctor exits.*)

MRS. LESTER. Good morning. (*She opens the door. Then seeing the Doctor has gone, she quickly closes it and goes to the window. Evidently she sees someone arriving outside whom she expects.*) Ah! That's all right. (*She removes hat and cape, which she drops on to armchair, then looks around to see if the coast is clear. Opens the door to admit Cort, who enters with hat in hand. He carries in his coat pocket a small box containing a pearl necklace sent out by a fashionable jeweller.*)

Good morning — You are from the jewellers — from Carter Brothers? Yes?

CORT. Yes, Madam, I —

MRS. LESTER. Oh, then you've brought the pearl necklace I —

CORT (*not sure of her identity*). Yes, Madam, they said at the shop that Dr. Gurney's niece —

MRS. LESTER. Sh! ! (*Looking cautiously at Doctor's office, then to Cort.*) Not so loud, the Doctor doesn't like to be disturbed while at work. I am Dr. Gurney's niece. I saw the pearls at the shop yesterday, you know, and lost my heart to them. But I couldn't, of course, make up my mind to such a frightful expense — they do cost a ghastly amount, don't they? I couldn't ruin myself like that without my Uncle's consent, could I? So that's why I asked to have them sent up — to show *him.*)

CORT (*he has taken the box from his pocket and removed the cord with which it was tied. He now removes the wrapping paper from box and speaks*). Yes, I understand. They are beautiful. It is the best string in the shop.

MRS. LESTER. I adore pearls, don't you? (*Very nervous and impatient.*) I was rather afraid I'd miss you. You see, I'm going into the country this morning — my car's out there now. (*She points to the window. Cort, still holding pearl box, looks out.*)

CORT. Oh, yes — yes.

MRS. LESTER (*looks quickly at Doctor's door, then to Cort*). Yes, that is why I asked to have them sent so early.

CORT (*opens pearl box*). Oh, I see. There! (*Handing her open box.*)

MRS. LESTER (*taking box and lifting pearls out*). Heavens! They *are* lovely, aren't they?

CORT. They are supposed, Mrs. — er — a —

MRS. LESTER. Lester.

CORT. To have belonged to a Russian lady — a Grand Duchess, I believe.

MRS. LESTER (*draping them about her neck*). Any Duchess would be grand with pearls like these — wouldn't she?

CORT. Not any grander than you.

MRS. LESTER. Oh, thank you. Now if you'll wait here a moment, my uncle is in his office. I'll show them to him now — won't you sit down, please? (*Pointing to chair.*)

CORT (*crosses to armchair, then suddenly and a bit embarrassed*). This is where the nuts come, isn't it?

MRS. LESTER. Nuts?

CORT. Yes — patients, I mean.

MRS. LESTER. Yes, why?

CORT. I — er — no — I — Well — You'll think me awfully silly, Mrs. Lester, but honestly, I have a regular horror of — (*Taps his forehead.*) — you know. I had an uncle once who was that way — loony — when I was a kiddie, and it frightened me so that I — (*crosses to door.*) No, I'll just wait out here if you don't mind.

MRS. LESTER (*seeing her plans upset*). Oh no! Don't do that.

CORT. Honestly, I'd rather, I'd —

DOCTOR (*off stage*). You're quite clear about what I mean, Nurse?

NURSE GRAY (*off stage*). I think so, quite.

DOCTOR. Good, all right then.

MRS. LESTER (*realizing she is about to be caught, glances at Doctor's office then quickly to Cort*). I'll show them to him now — just be seated please. (*Pointing to arm-chair.*)

CORT (*crosses past the chair to window and stands peering out. His back is now turned toward Mrs. Lester, who quickly picks up her cloak and hat and exits into the dressing-room. Nurse enters busily writing on her pad just as Cort turns from window. He sees her for the first time*). Hello!

NURSE GRAY (*starts — sees Cort*). Oh! You wish to see Dr. Gurney?

CORT. Oh no — no, I don't want to see the Doctor. I've brought a pearl necklace to his niece. She has just taken it in to show him. I'm waiting.

NURSE GRAY. Brought a what, did you say?

CORT. A pearl necklace.

NURSE GRAY (*mistaking him for Mrs. Lester's brother. She talks to him like a child*). Oh, yes, yes of course. I know, that's quite all right. Just wait, won't you? (*She wags a teasing finger at him.*)

CORT (*backs, somewhat alarmed*). That's what I am doing — waiting. This is a nut-cure, isn't it?

NURSE GRAY (*looking him over, smiling and continuing to write on pad*). Yes, *you* might call it that.

CORT. I suppose you get a lot of funny ones here — Nuts, I mean.

NURSE GRAY (*sarcastically*). Yes — we do.

CORT (*indicating office*). That's the Doctor's office?

NURSE GRAY. Yes, that's the Doctor's office.

CORT. She's in there?

NURSE GRAY. She — who?

CORT. His niece.

NURSE GRAY (*thoughtlessly, still writing*). Why, he has no niece.

CORT. What do you mean — has no niece? Why she was here — just a moment ago. She took the necklace from me — I'm Denny Cort — from Carter's. I brought her the pearls.

NURSE GRAY. Oh yes — the pearls. Yes, of course.

CORT. Well, is she in there?

NURSE GRAY (*confused*). No — yes — that is, the Doctor's busy just now. I dare say he'll be in there later.

CORT. Look here — what's the matter with you — why did you say he has no niece?

NURSE GRAY. Did I? I — I forgot.

CORT. But she's staying here?

NURSE GRAY (*humoring him and still writing*). Oh yes — yes, she's staying here.

CORT (*puzzled, he goes to armchair, and stands in front of it*). Yes, surely — of course she is — his niece.

NURSE GRAY (*gently takes him by the shoulders and pushes him down into chair*). Now, if I were you, I'd just sit down here and wait.

CORT (*getting up again*). Wait a minute! Are you a nurse here?

NURSE GRAY. Yes — I'm the doctor's assistant.

CORT (*somewhat relieved*). Oh — I thought you might be one of the nuts — er — patients.

NURSE GRAY. No — not yet. (*Smiling, she crosses to table and sits, writing.*)

CORT. Those pearls are worth fifty thousand dollars.

NURSE GRAY. Dear me — are they? It must be a very nice string, indeed.

CORT. She was crazy over them.

NURSE GRAY (*still writing*). She — who?

CORT. *His niece!*

NURSE GRAY. His niece? Oh yes — yes, of course.

CORT (*imitating her and sarcastically*). Yes — his niece, yes, yes, of course.

DOCTOR (*enters and stops in doorway*). Nurse, come in just a moment. (*Exits.*)

NURSE GRAY (*rising*). Yes, sir. (*At door, turns and speaks to Cort*). You won't have long to wait now.

(*Exits. Cort looks after her a moment, then stands looking out of window. He is hidden from the front door.*)

PATIENT (*opens door, peeps in and seeing no one about, tiptoes quickly to dressing-room door, and listens. Cort turns from the window and sees Patient, just as Patient looks around and sees Cort. Realizing that he is watched, Patient at once goes through violent antics of a lunatic. Then speaks*). Sh! Hyenas — baboons — beautiful little golden haired apes. (*Cort frightened. Patient points to dressing-room.*) Is she there? — is she?

CORT. Who?

PATIENT. Is she? — is she? (*Cort runs above table. Patient breaks into a shrill giggle and begins bobbing up and down, playing hide and seek over table.*) I see you! I see you, you little rascal! (*He runs around table. Cort runs to door. Patient suddenly stops and throws up a warning hand.*) Wait! Don't go out there! Don't you hear them?

CORT (*paralyzed with fright*). What?

PATIENT (*catching imaginary things out of the air*). Beetles! Buzz-saws! Blistering little bed bugs!

CORT. Why, I don't understand —

PATIENT (*violently*). You lied to me. She is in there! (*He rushes above table. Cort wheels and falls over the armchair. The Patient grabs him by the seat of his trousers as it comes up over the arm of the chair, and hurls him to the floor. He then breaks into wild laugh and exits quickly with a war-whoop.*)

CORT (*yelling at the top of his voice, he half crawls and runs to Doctor's door and begins hammering*). Dr. Gurney! Dr. Gurney! Dr. Gurney!

DOCTOR (*enters*). Good heavens, what is it, my boy — what is it?

CORT (*frantically*). Apes — baboons — hyenas — (*Then suddenly checking himself, much embarrassed.*) Oh! I beg your pardon — but — but — (*He throws his hands about trying to point out the Patient, then realizes he is gone. He tries to regain composure.*) Did she like the pearls, Sir?

DOCTOR. Did who — like what? (*The Nurse enters.*)

CORT. Why, the pearls — the pearls your niece —

NURSE GRAY (*speaks in a low tone*). It's the young man the lady spoke of — you remember?

DOCTOR. Ah — yes, yes. (*To Cort.*) Oh, the pearls, I haven't seen them yet. (*He rivets his eyes on Cort in search of symptoms.*)

CORT. She has them. She wants you to see them.

DOCTOR. Quite so. (*Smiles and pinches Cort on the cheek. Cort is dumbfounded.*) Quite so. Nurse, come in a moment. (*Nurse exits. Doctor turns.*) Will you have just a little more patience, young man, then we'll go into the pearl question together.

CORT. Thank you, Doctor, I'll wait.

(*Doctor exits. Cort looks about, watching the front door. Then he crosses nervously to window and looks out. Mrs. Lester opens dressing-room curtains and considers the possibility of getting to the front door unseen. Cort turns from window. Mrs. Lester darts back into dressing-room.*)

DOCTOR (*enters with Nurse*). Now, my son, I am ready for you, won't you come into my office?

CORT. What do you think of them?

DOCTOR. Think of what?

CORT. Why, the *pearls.*

DOCTOR. Oh yes — the pearls. (*Takes Cort by the arm.*) Come into my office, my boy, — and let us talk things over a bit.

CORT (*pulling away and growing irritated*). Wait a minute — talk over what?

DOCTOR. Steady, my son, steady. I just want to have a little friendly talk with you. Come in. (*Puts hand on him again.*)

CORT (*freeing himself*). But I don't understand all this talk. The pearls — the pearls! Where are they? Where's your niece, *where is she?*

DOCTOR. Keep calm, my son, keep calm. (*The Doctor grabs Cort and drags him around the table. He then swings Cort past him to the door. Cort quickly backs from the door. The Doctor gives him another heave and this time swings him into the door, but Cort breaks loose and runs around table.*) Nurse, lock the entrance door. Don't let anyone else in. (*Nurse locks the door.*)

CORT. You open that door or I'll — This is a frame-up — I'll call the Police — I'll call for help. (*Crosses toward window.*)

DOCTOR (*following and pulling him back*). Sit down there. (*He forces Cort into chair and stands over him.*)

Now — get control of yourself. (*In kindly voice.*) Nothing is going to happen to you or —

Cort (*rises*). But the pearls! For God's sake, where are they?

Doctor (*again forces him down in chair*). Nothing, I say, is going to happen to you or to the pearls. We'll find them, my son.

Cort (*again rising to his feet*). Don't call me, *My Son.* (*Doctor again puts him forcibly down into chair.*) The lady — where is the lady?

Nurse Gray. He's possessed with the idea that he gave the pearls to some woman.

Cort (*looks at Nurse in amazement*). Possessed with the idea? *I did* — you don't think *I'm* nutty, do you? (*Breaks loose. Indicating Nurse.*) *You're* insane. Doctor, *she's* insane.

Doctor. Quiet — quiet. Don't you see we want to help you?

Cort. Help me? Help? You Booby-Hatcher! She went in here — with the necklace. (*Opens Doctor's door and looks in.*) In here, I tell you — (*Seeing she is not there, he closes the door and spies the dressing-room. He is just entering as Mrs. Lester, aware she is about to be discovered, steps out and speaks.*)

Mrs. Lester. Why Denny, dear — What is it?

Cort (*grabs her by the wrists and throws her past him*). Here she is.

Nurse Gray. Good heavens — it's his sister!

DOCTOR (*in surprise*). Mrs. Lester.

CORT (*Mrs. Lester makes a dash for the front door. Cort runs after and catches her as she is at the door*). No you don't — no you don't! (*Drags her back.*)

MRS. LESTER. Oh, Denny dear —

CORT (*to Doctor*). She says she's your niece. *Is she?* Is she?

MRS. LESTER. Oh, I knew this would happen, if he saw me. I couldn't get away in time. Oh, this is awful.

CORT (*to Doctor*). *Is she your niece?*

DOCTOR. My son —

CORT (*in a rage*). Don't call me My Son! *Is She?*

DOCTOR. Listen to me. (*Pointing to Mrs. Lester.*) This is your sister — your sister.

CORT (*to Doctor*). Sister? Sister? That's a good one. (*To Mrs. Lester.*) Where's my necklace?

MRS. LESTER (*pleading*). Denny Darling — listen to me — please — listen to your sister — I —

CORT. Sister? I haven't got a sister.

DOCTOR. My son —

CORT. *And I'm Not* your son. (*Indicating Mrs. Lester.*) She's a thief. (*Seizing her arms.*) What have you done with them?

MRS. LESTER (*in pain*). Denny, don't!

CORT. Where are they?

MRS. LESTER. You're hurting me — *Denny!*

(*Doctor grabs Cort. The Nurse assists Mrs. Lester. They forcibly pull them apart.*)

CORT (*struggling to keep his hold on Mrs. Lester and speaking to her*). Don't you call me Denny. (*Breaks away from Doctor and crosses to phone.*) Let me get the phone, I'll telephone the police, I'll —

MRS. LESTER. Doctor, for Heaven's sake, stop him.

DOCTOR. Nurse, take that telephone.

(*Nurse grabs phone away from Cort. At the same time Doctor grabs Cort. He then speaks to Mrs. Lester while he holds Cort.*)

DOCTOR. Mrs. Lester, you'd better go.

CORT (*struggling*). You shan't go! Doctor, don't let her go, she's got my necklace.

DOCTOR (*still holding Cort*). Go, Mrs. Lester.

(*Nurse is about to unlock door.*)

CORT (*freeing himself he pounces upon Mrs. Lester just as she reaches the door. He grabs her by the arm*). You shan't go, come back here, you *Crook*. (*Throws her past him, and then gives her a push. He then turns upon the Doctor.*) You're *All* crooks. Don't you open that door, Nurse.
(*Nurse backs leaving the door locked. He turns to Mrs. Lester.*) *You Thief!*

MRS. LESTER (*breaking down*). Denny — Denny— Oh, this is awful!

CORT. It's terrible.

MRS. LESTER (*pleading*). Denny — look at me — look at me.

CORT. I'm looking at you all right, and if you try to —

MRS. LESTER. Oh, he's never been as bad as this before. (*To Cort.*) Darling, it's Nan, don't you see? Your old Nan, your old Sis. You know me, dear?

CORT. *You Bet*, I know you. (*Grabs her wrists forcibly.*)

MRS. LESTER (*to Doctor who tries to assist her*). No, please! Let me — I'm not afraid. He won't hurt me. (*To Cort.*) You wouldn't hurt Nan, would you, Denny? Now listen dear, try to remember *we all love you.*

DOCTOR. Yes, my boy, we're all your friends.

MRS. LESTER (*reassuringly, she talks to him like a baby*). There, now, don't worry about your pearls, you're going to get them — that's why we're here — to get your pearls back — don't you see? (*She starts laughing.*)

CORT (*trying to remonstrate*). But — but — I tell you —

DOCTOR. My boy — She's right. We're all your friends — all of us. *And you are going to find your pearls.*

MRS. LESTER (*laughing*). Of course — foolish boy. Now see how you've upset yourself, and all of us over nothing. (*putting her arm on his shoulder and pointing to Doctor*). Now listen to me. That man is going to find your pearls for you. That's what he is, a "pearl-finder"! He'll find them and then we'll go home, you and I — and

we'll make a nice big fire in the grate — just the sort you like — and sit and talk and tell stories — you know. Just pals. Don't you remember when you were a kiddie? It was always your Old Nan who came to you in your troubles? Well, it's like that now, dear. You're in trouble — great trouble — and Nan's helping you. Nan and this gentleman here. We're both helping you.

(*Cort is now separated from the others. During the last few speeches Mrs. Lester nods her head trying to convince him. Cort becomes mystified with these nods, looks from the Doctor to the Nurse, sees they are nodding, and he begins nodding. He suddenly comes to his senses and yells out.*)

CORT. *Say!* What's going on here? I want my pearls.

MRS. LESTER. Of course you do. I've got them — I've got them.

CORT. Yes, you've got them.

MRS. LESTER. But I don't want them. And the Doctor doesn't want them.

DOCTOR. No, my son.

MRS. LESTER. Nor the Nurse.

NURSE GRAY. I should say not.

MRS. LESTER. There! Don't you see?

CORT. Well, my heavens! (*Suddenly sees light.*) Oh — — oh — oh! (*Crosses to Doctor, puts his finger to his own head and nods toward Mrs. Lester.*) Is she — huh? (*Doctor smiles and nods "Yes."*) Oh, Gee! Why didn't you tell me!

MRS. LESTER (*has not noticed the pantomime*). There now, you see, everything is all right now, Buddy.

CORT (*grinning*). Oh sure, everything's all right now.

MRS. LESTER (*surprised at his change, but playing her game to the end*). Now, you are like yourself again — like the blessed old Brother you are.

CORT. That's it, blessed old brother. Of course you are Nan, my dear old Sis. (*He pats both of her cheeks with his hands. The Doctor signals the Nurse to unlock the door. Cort turns to Doctor.*) Doctor, you will have to pardon me for all this disturbance, but I didn't recognize her. It has been years since I saw her. Hasn't it, Sis, — ? (*He turns to her. But during the speech to Doctor, she has been slipping to the front door with Nurse. He sees her, dodges below Doctor and catches her before Nurse can open the door.*) No you don't! No, you don't! I brought a necklace up here, and you've got to give it to me.

(*Nurse now flings the door open.*)

MRS. LESTER. Doctor — help! He's twisting my arm. (*Doctor seizes Cort. They struggle.*) Denny — Denny, let me go — I haven't got them, I left them in the dressing-room.

CORT (*still clinging to Mrs. Lester as Doctor is trying to force him away*). You lie!

MRS. LESTER (*in pain*). Doctor — Doctor — he's hurting me — Oh! (*With one tremendous effort he forces Cort to release his hold on Mrs. Lester. Doctor is now above Cort, holding him, with his arms pinioned behind him. Cort's knees are bending and he is near collapse.*

His hair is over his face, his collar unbuttoned and his coat torn.) Nurse — telephone the asylum — for an ambulance.

NURSE GRAY. Yes, Doctor. (*Pantomimes call, merely yelling something to increase the excitement.*)

DOCTOR. Mrs. Lester, go — quickly — go!

MRS. LESTER (*hysterically*). Oh, I can't — I can't.

DOCTOR (*sternly*). Go!

MRS. LESTER. Be gentle with him, Doctor. Promise you'll be gentle with my brother.

CORT (*struggling with Doctor*). Oh, you devil.

MRS. LESTER. Denny — Denny — (*Kisses him on cheek.*) Good-by Denny. (*Goes quickly to door, then turns waving good-by.*) Thank you, doctor. Thank you, doctor. (*Exits. Cort is fighting hard to release himself from the Doctor.*)

DOCTOR. Nurse — lock the door! — (*She does so.*) Now get the straps from my office — you know — we've got to bind him. (*Nurse exits.*)

CORT (*with a tremendous effort he breaks loose and rushes to door after Mrs. Lester. He finds it locked*). She's gone! For heaven's sake don't let her go, doctor; she's got my necklace. (*Grabs telephone. Doctor snatches it from him.*) You thieves, you robbers— you let her get away, Oh — I'll break your head! (*He grabs a book and throws it at Doctor's head. Doctor is directly between Cort and the window. As Cort throws the book the Doctor ducks his head and the book crashes through the window. Cort continues to throw every-*

thing he can get his hands on. Doctor grabs him, as Nurse enters with straps.)

DOCTOR (*struggling with Cort*). Here — Nurse! (*Nurse helps him to bind Cort's feet and arms with straps. They put him unconsciously in the chair.*)

CORT. No — No — I'm not crazy, I tell you. (*He now collapses; his forehead is bleeding.*)

DOCTOR. He's hurt his forehead. Nurse, get a towel from the dressing room.

(*Nurse exits to dressing-room. Ambulance bell is heard outside.*)

Nurse, the ambulance is here.

NURSE GRAY (*enters from dressing-room with terrified expression on her face. In her hand is the box which contained the pearl necklace*). Doctor — Look!

DOCTOR. What is it?

NURSE GRAY (*looking at box, hypnotized*). It's a box — from Carters, the jewellers — I found it in there.

CORT (*dropping to his knees on floor*). Open it, you fool, open it!

NURSE GRAY (*opening box*). Empty!

DOCTOR. Empty!!

CORT. Empty!!!

NURSE GRAY. But there's this — (*Taking out a name card.*)

DOCTOR (*snatches card from Nurse and reads.*) "Thank you, Doctor" — Good Heavens — (*Loud voices heard*

off, as front door bursts open and Detective who previously appeared as Patient, enters dragging Mrs. Lester. She is protesting ad lib.)

DETECTIVE. Come along here, and shut up, I've got you at last. (*He throws back the lapel of his coat with his right hand, revealing his police badge. With his left he takes the pearl necklace from his coat pocket and lays it on corner of table.*) Thank you, Doctor, thank you. (*He begins taking out handcuffs, as curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

COPY

BY

KENDALL BANNING

ADAPTED FROM THE STORY BY
HAROLD KELLOCK

THE ORIGINAL CAST OF "COPY"

"Copy" was first produced in vaudeville with the eminent actor Mr. Edmund Breese in the stellar role and it scored an instant hit. It was produced under the direction of Mr. Martin Sabine, and the original cast was as follows:

DAVID LAY.....*Mr. Edmund Breese*
WILLIAM THOMAS....*Mr. W. T. Clarke*
ADAMS.....*Mr. Bernard Randall*
PRATT.....*Mr. Arthur Stein*
JIMMY.....*Mr. David Ross*
BALDWIN.....*Mr. J. T. Elliot*
WILSON.....*Mr. C. Vaughan*

SCENE: *A New York newspaper office.*

TIME: *A Summer afternoon.*

COPY

The City Editor's Office of the Daily News. It is a man's office. On the tables are pencils, scratch pads, scissors, newspaper clippings, directories, etc. Much waste is scattered about the floor, which increases as the scene progresses. As the curtain rises, Thomas, Pratt, and Adams are discovered at their desks at work. Adams is pounding on the typewriter. After a few moments, he stops and scratches his head in thought, then speaks to Pratt.

ADAMS. How do you spell cat-cat-cataclysm?

PRATT (*without looking around*). Never use such language. Ask Thomas.

THOMAS. What's that?

ADAMS. How do you spell cat-cat-cat-

THOMAS. C-a-t, cat.

ADAMS. Ah, s-shut up! (*Rises and consults the dictionary. The others laugh and resume their work. After a moment, Jimmy enters. He carries in one hand a large sandwich wrapped in tissue paper, and in the other a can of hot coffee. He sets them in front of Thomas. Then he takes out dime novel, lies down on bench and starts reading. Thomas has unwrapped his sandwich and be-*

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gun eating. He sips his coffee and then spits it out and explodes.)

THOMAS. Where the hell's the sugar?

JIMMY. Got it. (*Jimmy, taking three lumps of sugar out of his pocket, throws them in the can, one by one, splashing Thomas.*)

THOMAS. Hey! Stop that! What d'yer think you are — a shower bath?

ADAMS. Here's Senator D-Duggan's obituary. Is he d-dead yet?

THOMAS. Cripes, no! Got a message saying he'll get well.

ADAMS. H-hard luck. That k-knocks out h-half a c-column.

THOMAS. Lay it aside. He'll croak later.

ADAMS. M-missed his chance today. Since there's no other n-news, we c-could have made him a h-head liner.

THOMAS. Now get busy with some letters for the love-sick column to-morrow. Get lots of mush into 'em, especially if they are supposed to come from the old ones.

ADAMS. Oh f-fish-hooks! (*Sits and begins typewriting and tearing up pages in despair. Jimmy gets interested in the book and suddenly sits up, gesturing.*)

PRATT. Where was Lay yesterday, Tommy? Out on a souse?

THOMAS. No. Wedding anniversary. Always stays home on wedding anniversary. Wife and kid, y'know.

PRATT. Gee, I didn't know he had 'em. Thought he fed on type and whiskey and married a linotype machine.

THOMAS. Oh! He's the original soft-hearted husband and father. He'd sacrifice an extra edition and stay home a week if that kid of his should sneeze twice.

ADAMS. *S-soft!* He's about as soft as a d-d-dreadnaught.

THOMAS (*picking up papers*). Copy here, boy! Rotten bunch of junk today. Not a line of news in the paper. . . . Hey, boy. (*Jimmy reading and gesturing.*) Boy! (*He pounds on table. Jimmy jumps up and takes copy to composing room. Wilson enters.*)

PRATT (*yawning. To Thomas*). Haven't you got a nice murder for me to cover out at Coney Island? It's a good day for a swim.

THOMAS. If you were a real sport, Pratt, you'd jump off the top of some of these tall buildings on Broadway and give us a splash for a whole column or two, instead of loafing on the job.

PRATT (*looking at himself*). I guess I'd made quite a splash on Broadway, at that.

WILSON. And afterwards the office would be quieter.

ADAMS (*pointing over his shoulder at Wilson without looking around*). H-ha! J-joke!

PRATT. You stick to your heart throbs, Adams. (*Jimmy enters and sits reading.*) But I do wish they'd start the round of divorce, robbery, and suicide a little earlier these summer mornings. I need the afternoon for

a very important — nap. (*He yawns, and all others yawn in rotation.*)

THOMAS (*to Wilson*). Any political news over the wire?

WILSON. Yes, here's some now. Says the Governor's son has lost so much sleep at college that he was found nervous. Studying too much, I guess.

THOMAS. We haven't any space for the Governor's son.

ADAMS. Might put him in the "L-L-Lost and Found" column.

LAY (*Lay enters. He carries manuscripts and papers, and is enthusiastic. Everyone suddenly sits up and assumes the appearance of working. The machines begin to click.*) Well, boys, I've got it. It's a great big stink about the public schools.

THOMAS. What's the School Board been doing now?

LAY. Nothing. Creating my own stink. Coming down on the car this morning I overheard an argument between two women over the question of teaching swimming, flowers, and stuff in the public schools. One favored it and the other was against it. They had it hot, and were still at it when I left them.

THOMAS. And the stink?

LAY. That was the first whiff. The whole town will be debating the same question to-night when this paper comes out. Yes, sir; special edition on the schools.

THOMAS. Swimming and flowers, eh? What will you call it—"Soaking the Kids" or "Lilies for the Little Ones"?

LAY. It's good for the front page, and will raise the devil with the School Board.

THOMAS. How much dope have you got on it?

LAY. Enough to start. Blake will bring me the rest. I left him down in a joint just now with the clerk of the School Board. He is getting him soused so he will talk.

PRATT. If the clerk ever gets soused enough to talk, Blake will be too drunk to remember it.

LAY. Anyhow, we will start something that they can smell from here to Bingville against the wind. What are you doing now, Adams?

ADAMS. "Letters from the Lovesick."

LAY. Drop it. Here, take this bunch of notes and make a story for the Home Edition.

ADAMS. W-which side am I on?

LAY. You are one of these nature women, and you favor swimming, flowers, and every other fad and frill you can think of. What are you working on, Pratt?

PRATT. Nothing.

LAY (*unconsciously*). Drop that, too. (*Then facing Pratt.*) You're a mother of eight kids, see? Your kids never go swimming except in the kitchen sink. You're mad clean through. You don't care whether they know a violet from a cauliflower, but you do want 'em to add and spell. So kick out a hot letter of protest. Here, boy.

ADAMS. Eight k-kids! Oh m-mother!

(*Lay looks at him. He hastily resumes typing. Telephone bell rings.*)

LAY (*answering telephone*). Hello! Yes! Yes! All right, we'll get it. Pratt, there's a fire somewhere uptown. Take it, will you? Probably only an ash can afire — but get a story out of it. (*Pratt goes into telephone booth.*) We want to splurge on this school business, Thomas.

THOMAS. Sure. Being a bachelor I am opposed to public schools, anyway — tax me too much for somebody else's kids.

WILSON. Thomas is even opposed to Sunday-schools, because they charge him ten cents every Sunday for saving his soul.

ADAMS (*facing toward Wilson*). He ought to kick, because, in his c-c-case, they are over-charging him a h-h-hundred per cent . . .

LAY. Sunday-schools are all right. I sent my wife and kid out on a Sunday-school picnic today.

THOMAS. Sure they are all right — on a picnic. Where did they go? — over to Coney Island, where they could see nature in the rough?

LAY. I don't know. Took a boat somewhere.

THOMAS (*with emphasis*). Every time I see a bunch of Sunday-school kids go off on one of those rotten river boats, I wonder how long it'll be before they blow up and drown a couple of thousand — and give us a *real* story!

LAY. Nix on that story today, Thomas; wait until my wife and Lucy get back. Mary, the housekeeper, is the only one left at home. What live stuff we got besides this school roar?

THOMAS (*consulting sheets of paper*). Only some junk. Two suicides.

LAY. Features?

THOMAS. One's a servant girl. Despondent. Gas.

LAY (*with disgust*). These little suicides are not much good. Three or four lines will be enough.

THOMAS. Other woman is the wife of teller in bank. Drank a carbolic cocktail because hubby got $22.00 a week and she couldn't bring up the three kids.

LAY. Good human interest stuff. Play it up. Run pictures of little flat, mother and kids, and blame it all on the bank. Here boy!— (*Jimmy takes copy and exits.*) (*thoughtfully*) Oh, what's the bank?

THOMAS. Tenth National.

LAY. Oh! They're the guys who have an interest in this paper. Better chop the story down to a stick and put it on the fourth page. Perhaps the woman was a spendthrift. Anything else?

THOMAS. Snakes escaped last night from the zoo. Captured this morning.

LAY. Let 'em escape this morning. Make 'em poisonous and bring plenty of women and children into it. Haven't been captured yet. What else?

THOMAS. There's a line about a cat that was killed on the railroad tracks up in Westchester.

LAY. Cat? Nine lives lost on the railroad. Make it a wild cat and pad it out.

ADAMS. Why not make it a p-p-pole cat; and create an atmosphere for that S-S-School Board Edition. (*He sits laughing. Pratt comes out of the phone booth.*)

LAY. What have you got on that fire?

PRATT (*simulating Irish brogue*). "Mrs. Maggie Murphy tried to start the coal range with gasoline: lost her false teeth."

LAY. Where was it?

PRATT. Couldn't find out. Somewhere up the river.

LAY. You have enough facts to start on. Put everybody in a panic and make it a half column spread for the next edition. That all?

THOMAS. Trolley car turned a somersault down the street this morning — tried to stop a flivver.

LAY (*Jimmy enters*). That'll make a spread — (*The phone rings; he takes receiver languidly.*) Hello! — Yes, this is the city desk. (*A look of pleased surprise comes over his face.*) Good! (*Adams ceases typewriting and looks up at Lay. Pratt glances at him inquiringly and Thomas turns laboriously in his chair. Jimmy continues reading, complacently. Lay hangs up receiver*). Headquarters reports that fire's up around 220th Street, near the river. That's the fashionable section. Maybe we'll get some real copy now. (*Grabs the telephone again.*) Hello! That you, Miss Pierce? Give me the Harlem Office, please. Watson can drop that feature column he's working on and hustle around. That you, Watson? Oh, Watson, cut out that feature column for today and jump up to 220th Street near the river — there's a fire that sounds like a good story. That so? Is that so? Fine! Call me up as soon as you get anything. Good-by. (*Rings off.*) Watson says a half dozen fire departments have been called out. Here, Adams, toss over that telephone book, quick.

ADAMS (*rises quickly, balancing the Subscribers' and Classified directories in either hand, as if to ask "Which one?"*). Wh-wh-wh —

LAY. And don't stutter.

ADAMS. Take 'em both. (*He tosses over both books.*)

LAY (*hastily fumbles the pages and runs his fingers up and down the column*). 200-215-220th Street — West. Let's see — "Patrick Noonan, Saloon." That'll do. (*He speaks into the telephone.*) Tremont 2461 — That Noonan's saloon? This is the office of the City News. Say, what do you know about the fire up your way? No! No! Not the city *Jews!* The City *News* — a newspaper. What about the fire? Of course you do! Look out of the window and see the smoke — Well, don't you know anything? Haven't you heard the engines go by? Give your boy a dollar for me to go out and look around. I'll hold the wire. And say — say — Hello? Hello — Hell — Rung off! (*He hangs up the receiver with disgust.*)

THOMAS. That fire's good for something if we get it in time. Perhaps we can stretch it out for the Final Evening Edition.

LAY (*phone rings, Lay answers it*). Well, what is it? — Yes, city desk. That right? How many dead? So! All right — We'll get it. (*Hangs up the receiver.*) This looks good. Headquarters says the fire is on a Transport boat up the Hudson. Possibly several children drowned.

PRATT. Shall I go up to the fire?

LAY. No, need you here to handle this end of it. Start the Yonkers men out. Then call up the steam-boat peo-

ple; and see what you can dig up along the Hudson water front by phone.

THOMAS (*to Pratt*). That ought to hold you for awhile. No swimming today for you.

(*Pratt enters the booth, closing the door.*)

LAY. Cut the comedy, Thomas. This fire story is beginning to look big. Human interest always comes first; lots of human interest in kids. (*Turning to Wilson.*) Oh, Wilson, jump into the reference room and tell Edwards to look up steam-boat accidents. (*Wilson turns as if to ask a question.*) Quick! (*Wilson wheels, running into Thomas. Lay hands Thomas some sheets of paper.*) Here, take that in, and mark the proofs double spacing. (*Thomas exits.*) Now I've got to get hold of Baldwin. He should be up at the fire right now. Oh, Jimmy!

JIMMY (*showing the first signs of interest, rises quickly and adjusts his cap*). You want me to go up to the fire and get Baldwin?

LAY. Don't ask foolish questions. (*Offering sheets of paper.*) Take this to the composing room and tell them to hold four columns on the first page for an extra edition. (*Jimmy takes papers.*) Hurry, Jimmy!

(*Jimmy gives a leap and runs into Thomas, just entering.*)

THOMAS (*looking after Jimmy and backing down to above Adams' chair*). Watch yourself! (*He turns just in time to run into Adams' chair.*)

ADAMS. W-w-watch *your*self!

LAY (*seizes the telephone*). Hello! Hello! Give me the manager's office — Hello! Is this Mr. Stewart? This

is Lay. Can you spare Baldwin this afternoon? Got a big story — a boat's on fire up the Hudson. Oh! He's on his way over here now. Fine! I'll catch him. Good-by. (*Hangs up receiver. Baldwin enters.*) Oh! hello, Baldwin. I was just telephoning for you. There's a boat on fire up the Hudson. Look up the system of permits and licenses, and find out who inspects the river boats. Then go up to the fire as quick as you can. (*Pratt comes out of the booth.*) What's the boat?

PRATT. Can't get anything out of the steam-boat company; never can when there's a wreck. But St. Francis Hospital up there reports lots doing.

ADAMS (*suddenly turning around*). I c-could get it out of them, if I was up there. Shall I g-g-go? (*Grabs hat and coat as if sure of the answer.*)

LAY. N-N-No! (*Then yelling and pounding the desk.*) Shut up! ! ! You've got me doing it now! (*Wilson enters.*) You've got enough facts for a starter; get busy and turn 'em out. The wires are going to pour it into us in a few minutes. (*Jimmy enters.*)

THOMAS. How's this for a seven column head? Can't miss this chance for a splash on the front page!

PRATT. Fine! I'd set it in war gothic, paragraph at a time. (*They consult quietly over the manuscript. All are now engrossed and do not observe Lay in the following speech.*)

LAY (*phone rings, Lay answers*). Hello! — Yes, yes, the city desk — Two hundred dead? (*Excitedly.*) Mostly kids and women! (*He makes notes hastily on a pad.*) Maybe three hundred? (*Awed.*) For heaven's sake! Is that straight? (*Rapidly.*) What kind of a party

is it? What's the name of the boat? Well, do you know where the boat started from? When did she leave dock? (*Rises and speaks explosively.*) *The Seabird* — Hudson Transport Company. 9 o'clock. (*He staggers, and then after a moment speaks calmly in a dazed manner.*) That's all. All right! Let me know when you get more. . . . Good-by. (*Hangs up receiver, wonderingly.*) Sunday-school kids! (*Aloud, pulling himself together.*) Oh! Adams! Here, call up the steam-boat people again and find out what Sunday-school it took out and then dig up a cut of the boats in our files. (*Adams goes into phone booth, leaving door open. Wilson exits.*)

ADAMS. H-hello! Hello! Get me R-Rector 2662.

PRATT (*gaily to Lay as he sits*). This is a real story! Three hundred Sunday-school kids! And say! Talk about that story on licenses from the Permit Department that we've been working up. Wow!

ADAMS (*in booth*). Is this the Hudson River Transport C-C-Company? What S-S-Sunday-school did you t-t-take out this morning? (*Hangs up and comes out of the booth in a rage.*)

LAY. What did they say?

ADAMS. Told me not to s-s-s-stutter.

THOMAS (*grabs desk phone*). Let me talk to that bunch. Give me Rector 2662. (*He jiggles the hook and wipes his brow impatiently during next two speeches.*)

BALDWIN (*putting down papers*). Here's that information on permits and licenses and the names of all inspectors.

LAY. Fine. Now go up to the fire as quick as you can. Stop on your way out and get Sloan. Hire cabs and messengers and tugs and things. Give us all the facts — don't mind about running up bills. Tell Sloan to cover the human interest stuff and get it down here before four o'clock sure. Get fifty dollars from the office. Now beat it! (*Baldwin exits.*) Are those heads out of the way, Pratt?

PRATT. Yep, here they are.

LAY. Now keep your ear glued to that phone, (*Points to phone booth.*) and rush the news to me as it comes over.

(*Pratt exits into phone booth, closing door.*)

THOMAS (*now jiggling the hook violently, explodes*). Hello! Well, it's time you are answering. This is the City News. What Sunday-school is that you took out this morning? Well, look it up; I'll hold the wire. (*To Lay.*) Those guys will hold back that dope until its outlawed — if they can.

LAY. *If* they *can?* (*Rises grimly.*) Give me that 'phone, Thomas. (*Thomas passes it over. Wilson enters.*) Hello! Hello! (*He calls Central sharply.*) Hello — Yes Central, of course I'm holding the wire; what do you think I'm doing, skipping rope? Oh, they hung up, did they? Well, ring 'em again — and keep ringing 'em till you get 'em. (*He drums impatiently on the desk.*) Hello! Hello! This is Lay — city editor of the News. I want the name of that Sunday-school — quick! — That's all right; can the bluff. I want it *now.* — I said now — N-O-W, now while I'm talking to you! — Say, listen; do you want the public to read to-morrow how you get

your licenses? Ask your manager that — while I hold the wire!

ADAMS (*joyously*). That's the way to do it! B-b-bully them!

(*Both typewriters and all telegraph instruments are now working. There is a long pause.*)

LAY. Great God! (*He staggers and hangs up receiver. The machines are now pounding violently. No one notices Lay who stands in agony. Pratt thrusts his head out of the booth.*)

PRATT. Over three hundred dead! (*Withdraws and closes door.*)

LAY (*taking the telephone unobserved by others, and speaking quietly*). Hello! Hello! Get Morningside 2649 — and please hurry, Central . . . Hello! Is this Morningside 2649 — That you Mary? — Say — what's the name of that boat that Mrs. Lay and Lucy went off on today? Well, would you remember if I told you the name? Was it *The Seabird?* — Think so, eh? Are you sure? Dead sure? — Well, say, Mary: If she shouldn't come in this afternoon — if you hear anything, call me up. I — I want her. Good-by. (*Hangs up the receiver, gazing blankly before him.*)

PRATT (*again thrusting his head out of the booth*). Four hundred and fifty dead! (*Withdraws and closes door.*)

THOMAS. Gee, that's some story. Gol-durned good story this. It'll fill us full for a week. (*Looks at Lay and sees him idle. Then pounds the desk noisily.*) Wake up, Lay, wake up! We're putting over a live one!

(*All machines and telegraph instruments again go into action violently.*)

LAY (*as though awakening, suddenly blows down the speaking tube, directing sharply*). This is Lay. Rush that excursion boat stuff ahead of everything else. Keep the three first pages open. Got that? (*He snaps the tube shut, wonderingly.*) Three pages! Twenty-one columns! "Good story," eh? Hey, Jimmy, see what Edwards has ready, and bring it to me.

(*Jimmy exits.*)

PRATT (*from the telephone booth*). She's been run aground, ablaze from stem to stern. Five hundred estimated dead now — the water's full of women and children. Cracker-jack story! I'm getting the names — here's part of 'em.

(*Lay takes list. Searches it quickly, but doesn't find the two names he is looking for.*)

LAY. Rush the rest here when they come, Pratt. (*Pratt again closes door. Wilson exits. The desk phone rings. Lay answers.*) City desk, yes. We have just send Baldwin. Can't spare any more. Well, send up the best men you have, and tell them to rush the stuff back to us as fast as they get it. Good-by. (*Jimmy enters, places papers before Lay.*) Good! coming from the city news wires too. Here's where they pour it into us. (*Thomas' and Adams' typewriters have stopped. All is quiet in the room. Suddenly from the street below is heard "Extra! Extra! All about the big fire!" etc.*) Huh! There's an extra. Somebody has beat us to it. Run down, Jimmy, and get us a copy. (*Jimmy exits.*) Give us a few more minutes and we'll have them yelling, too. (*Lay exits.*

Pratt comes out of booth, with notes in hand, and glances apprehensively about. Then to Adams.)

PRATT. Look! (*He points to a place on the lists.*)

ADAMS (*reading aloud carelessly*). "Lucy Lay and woman supposed to be her mother" —

PRATT (*shaking him, and looking about*). Sh! That's his wife — Lay's wife and kid!

ADAMS. His wife! —

PRATT. Sh! — (*They go over to Thomas. Wilson enters.*) Say, Thomas — quiet now — Lay's wife and kid —

THOMAS. Great Scott!

PRATT. Sh! — Look here! He can't do anything up there, now. If he goes, he'll only get reckless and add another name to the list. There's only a dozen or two names out — see? I guess the News can stand for two names shy. Cut these two names off, Adams. (*He slashes the two names with his pencil and hands the lists to Adams. Lay enters. Adams turns, sees him and quickly nudges the others. They all try to return to their places without attracting Lay's attention. All watch him. Lay suddenly grabs some papers off his desk.*)

LAY. Here Pratt! Get that ready — quick! Sixteen hundred people on the boat when it caught fire. Life rafts sunk like lead and the life belts pulled 'em to the bottom. Rotten hose and all that. Great send-off for the Department of Permit story. Have to rush it. (*There is a moment of silence, save the click of machinery. All machines and telegraph instruments are working violently. Lay quietly and deliberately reaches out and ex-*

tracts the sheet from Adams' machine and tears it into small pieces. All machines stop.)

LAY. That's all right, Adams. This is the list we'll use. (*He picks up the sheets which Adams had been copying and runs over them, tapping the two names on the list.*) You're quite sure you got that straight, Adams?

ADAMS (*much embarrassed, points to Pratt*). *He* took the names down; I dunno!

LAY. Thomas, my wife and kid — Ann and Lucy — are — were — on *The Seabird.*

THOMAS. You — your wife?

LAY. Cut out the surprise stuff; I got it — several minutes ago. I couldn't do anything up there, and we've got to get out the paper. (*Speaks to Pratt.*) How — how were they — er — identified?

THOMAS (*explosively*). We wanted to wait until we could get you outside and break it. All this crowd and noise and — and — everything —

LAY. Yes, yes! Cut the excuses, too. But how did they know — who — they were?

PRATT. Name on the kid's lunch box.

LAY. Adams, change those lines to read "Mrs. David Lay, 516 West 159th Street, and Lucy Lay, 10 years old, her daughter, same address." Rush the rest of that list as soon as it comes in. (*Lay sits and coolly begins writing copy.*)

THOMAS (*to Pratt*). There's the newspaper man for you! (*Pratt crosses into phone booth. Thomas restlessly walks up and down.*)

LAY. Pass over your copy, Adams. Here's a chance to show whether you're journalists or just reporters. What you turn out today will count for or against you. (*Adams hands Lay his copy.*) Here, Thomas, arrange the display for all pages and number columns and pages. (*Thomas takes proofs and exits.*)

PRATT (*enters from booth*). Here are a few more names — all kids.

(*Wilson exits.*)

LAY. Children! All children! Hundreds of them burned or drowned — and their mothers and fathers standing on the bank of that river up there, waiting! —

(*Thomas enters. Jimmy enters.*)

JIMMY. The Journal is the only one out.

LAY. Jimmy, round up all the stuff, it's time for the forms to close.

(*Jimmy exits. Wilson enters.*)

THOMAS (*pounding the desk. To Lay*). Say, how is it we only get five hundred dead and the Journal gets seven hundred? Why in blazes can't we get as many as the other papers?

LAY (*smiling vaguely*). We see their seven hundred and raise them a hundred. Our latest estimate is eight hundred, Billy. Don't use "holocaust," Adams. Be original. Every paper in town'll use that word. And for heaven's sake, cut out "caught like rats in a trap." (*Enter Jimmy with several sheets of paper. He lays them before Lay.*) Here we are — just in time. Get everything together now. Adams, add this to your story. (*He gives*

a couple of sheets to Jimmy, who takes them to Adams.)
Got three minutes yet. Hustle!

(*The scene now becomes exceedingly busy and noisy. When the characters are not moving, they are pounding their machines. Lay hesitates for a moment, then feverishly runs his hands through his hair. Suddenly he pulls open the right drawer of his desk, and seizes a pistol.*)

Adams (*rises*). What are you going to do?
(*All machines stop.*)

Lay (*speaking loudly as if going to pieces*). Do? I am going out and shoot all the directors of the steam-boat company and the captain, and the government inspectors who passed those life belts — and — then possibly myself.

(*Thomas takes pistol.*)

Thomas. Dave!

Omnes (*for a moment all speak and move, then Lay breaks in*).

Lay (*grimly pounding the desk*). But I'll see this edition through *first!* Wilson, pass your stuff over. Here, Jimmy, take these in. (*Jimmy takes proofs and exits.*) What have you got, Pratt? (*Pratt hands him a bunch of loose papers. These Lay holds in his hand and scatters during the excitement of the telephone speech. The telephone rings. Lay takes up receiver.*) Hello — this is the city desk. (*He shows great excitement. All watch him.*) Ann! Ann! Where? — how? — alive! (*Fervently.*) Thank God! — Didn't go? (*To Thomas in great excitement.*) That's my wife — safe! And the kid!

(*To the telephone.*) Yes! Yes! Go on, — Stopped to buy a flower to show the children! But what about Lucy's lunch box? — God bless you dear. God bless you — Yes, yes! I'm coming. I'm coming — Now! (*He slams down the receiver and talks with nervous haste in an attempt to conceal his excitement. Pounding on the desk.*)

LAY. They're safe, man — safe! Gave Lucy's lunch box to a neighbor to carry — missed the boat. (*Gets hat. A gong rings without. The presses start clinking.*) All right, there's the presses. Get your stuff in. (*All feverishly begin grabbing their stuff from their desks. The phone rings. Adams takes receiver.*) And say, cut out that story about teaching swimming and flowers in the schools. I guess the kids ought to have it.

ADAMS (*who has been standing expectantly at the telephone*). The boss wants you on the w-wire!

LAY. The boss! tell the boss I've gone home — home to Ann — and the kid. (*He wavers, dazed, then rushes unsteadily through the door, putting on his hat.*)

CURTAIN

THE TRAP

BY

ALICE GERSTENBERG

CHARACTERS

Aaron Carrithers
Irene, *his wife*
Millicent Griffith
Claude Rogers

THE TRAP

SCENE: *Half kitchenette and half dinette. When the curtain rises Irene, in an evening gown protected by a calico apron, is busy stirring soup in a kettle which stands upon a stove only suggestively seen by the audience. After glancing at her wrist watch she hurries to the telephone in the dinette at left.*

IRENE. Commissary Department. (*After a short wait.*) This is Mrs. Carrithers in Apartment 41. I am still waiting for the egg-plant. I don't know why I bother to accommodate the hotel when I could telephone directly to the shops myself. My dinner guests will be here soon. (*Listens.*) Then *don't* send it! (*Hangs up receiver, is about to return to the kitchenette when she starts back with a shriek, raising her skirts in fear of a mouse and jumping on a chair.*) Oh, oh, a mouse! I thought we caught you yesterday! (*Making stepping stones of chairs she walks on chairs back to the telephone.*) I have a mouse! Send a bellboy with a trap! I have a mouse! (*Hangs up.*)

AARON (*calls from right*). Hoo, hoo!

IRENE. Aaron, I can't stay in this place another hour. You didn't catch that mouse yesterday.

AARON (*enters from left in top coat, an evening newspaper in one pocket*). Yes, I did.

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IRENE. Just now it ran under there.

AARON. Must be the mate.

IRENE. Oh, why must they have mates!

AARON (*puts his arms about her knees and lifts her to the floor*). It will stay in its corner while we're stamping around.

IRENE. Oh, Aaron, it isn't so bad when you're here —

AARON. Such a fraidy girl. (*Kisses her.*)

IRENE. Oh, Aaron, I do want Millie and Claude to find each other as we have.

AARON (*sheds his coat, puts on an apron and squeezes lemon juice into a cocktail shaker*). What's the matter with Millicent, can't she find a husband for herself?

IRENE (*going on with preparations for dinner*). She hasn't any go-get-him qualities. She sits around dreaming at the sky hoping a husband is going to fall into her lap like a cocoanut from a tree.

AARON. The way I fell for you.

IRENE. The town was watching my campaign for you. "There's that Aaron Carrithers," they said, "what a pity, still unmarried, and beginning to show it."

AARON. Show it? How?

IRENE. You watch Claude tonight. You'll see his bachelor signs.

AARON. Great Scott! What are they? (*Looks into a mirror anxiously.*)

IRENE (*pats his cheek*). You haven't the look any more, darling. You're married!

(*There is a pounding off left.*)

AARON (*goes out left*). Who is it?

VOICE. Here's a mouse trap.

AARON. All right, boy, here's a tip. (*Re-enters with set trap.*) Where shall I put this cheese banquet?

IRENE. Under the cupboard. Oh, Aaron, we must get out of this place! We must settle it to-night. Millie likes the apartment. If we can make Claude propose an elopement they could move right in here.

AARON. So that's your scheme.

IRENE. I want a little house in the country all our own but with plenty of closet space. You've been putting your shoes upon my hat boxes and this morning my new twenty-five dollar hat had a dent in the crown.

AARON. Sorry, but you wouldn't let me keep the shoes under the bed. (*Takes a large colorful bowl and proceeds to mix condiments in it.*) Where's the garlic?

IRENE (*gives him a tiny paper bag*). Not too much, darling.

AARON. We have to drown out the smell of onions from the apartment across the way, or was it cabbage when I came in to-night?

IRENE. Well, don't try to vie with the neighbors.

AARON (*rubs inside of the bowl with garlic*). I learned this artistic achievement from an Italian priest in the

vineyards of Italy. Oh, come, thou fragrant reminder of green hills and valleys and the steaming, fertile earth.

IRENE. Oh, oh, there's a cockroach — kill it!

AARON (*dashing to do so*). Didn't the exterminator come yesterday?

IRENE. Yes, but he can't keep up with the birthrate.

AARON. This one surely can't be ours.

IRENE. If you'll look at it closely it'll be tagged with the name of the people upstairs, or the people downstairs, or the people to the right and left of us.

AARON. Maybe it's one of our old ones chased away, coming home.

IRENE. They get so chased around, up and down, forward and back, I should think they'd die off thoroughly discouraged. You'll think I'm not neat but the scrub woman comes twice a week and you know how particular I am about putting the very last crumb into the incinerator.

AARON (*flicks something away*).

IRENE (*quickly*). What did you do then?

AARON. Nothing.

IRENE. You shooed off something.

AARON. Only flicked off some paprika.

IRENE. Aaron, look me straight in the eyes and tell me it wasn't another —

AARON. Cross my heart, it wasn't another —

IRENE. Then it was a silver bug.

AARON. Just a flash of one.

IRENE. Oh, they're so quick and so white! (*Gets hysterical.*) I could scream! They come exiled from the (*nods up, below, to right and to left*) Heywoods, the Fortenberrys, the Kiefers, the Naughtleys. (*A buzzer rings.*)

AARON. Here they are. (*Exit up right.*)

IRENE. Hurry, dress, I'll let them in. (*Exit down right.*) Oh, Millie, are you all alone? (*Re-enters followed by Millie.*) Where's Claude?

MILLIE (*drops her evening coat over a convenient chair*). I don't know.

IRENE. Didn't he call for you?

MILLIE. Don't you know Claude Rogers well enough to know he's not going an inch out of his comfortable way?

IRENE. Oh, I could shake you for falling in love with him. Why didn't you pick on some one who would give you a ghost of a chance?

MILLIE (*lights a cigarette*). I had a pony once that would come across the field for sugar, but when I tried to catch him he would slip away. The coachman used another method and held his nose. (*Takes a puff.*) It's all a question of how it's done.

IRENE. If I hold his nose for you will you promise to elope and go to housekeeping right away?

MILLIE. Of course, that's what I'm aching to do!

IRENE. You'd better learn about kitchenettes. I've the finest in the city, and the rent is only three hundred a month.

MILLIE. It's too cute for words.

IRENE. See my aluminum pots and pans, shiny as mirrors! All you do is telephone downstairs to the Commissary department for food. The service is very prompt.

MILLIE. If I had a jealous disposition, I'd want to put you right out and come in here with Claude.

IRENE. You're not going to get *my* precious little love nest, no, my dear. You can scour the town the way we did. But now that we're as cozy here as two bugs in a — I mean —

MILLIE. Bugs in a rug, that's the phrase.

IRENE. It just struck me that it isn't a very elegant expression.

MILLIE. Maybe not elegant, but oh, Irene, I'd adore to be with Claude as cozy as two bugs in a rug.

IRENE. Maybe you will be, my dear, I hope you will. (*Surreptitiously shoos something off the table.*)

AARON (*calls from off right*). Irene, Irene! Didn't the laundry come back?

IRENE (*calls off right*). I didn't have time to unpack it, darling. I hid the box behind the window drapes in the living-room. (*To Millie.*) Some of the mundane conversation of married life.

MILLIE. But such cute conversation, it sounds so adorably intimate.

(*A buzzer rings.*)

IRENE. There's Claude, will you let him in? Here, put an apron on. It will stimulate domestic ideas about you.

MILLIE (*ties apron*). How clever you are. (*Exit down right.*) Hello Claude. (*Re-enters followed by Claude.*)

CLAUDE. Hello, Millie, what are you, the maid?

MILLIE. Come in, sir. (*With a curtsy.*) Madam is cooking the dinner.

IRENE (*pokes her head into dinette*). She means I'm helping her cook the dinner.

CLAUDE. I didn't know Millie could cook.

IRENE. She's made the whole dinner to-night. If you men are satisfied I shall give her her graduating diploma.

CLAUDE. If I had known *that,* I could have brought a bouquet or something.

IRENE. Well, to-morrow you can send her a bouquet or — something. (*Returns to kitchenette.*)

CLAUDE. To think of *your* cooking!

MILLIE. Is that so strange?

CLAUDE. You always seem to dabble with food as if you didn't need it. Your hand uses the silver as if it were a cigarette that merely helps to waste time.

IRENE (*takes off her apron and enters from left with tray of cocktails and appetizers*). Start the cocktails, Claude. (*Calls off right.*) Come on, Aaron.

MILLIE. Cool, beautiful, zippy!

CLAUDE. Aaron knows how to mix 'em.

AARON (*enters from right*). Hello, Millie, Claude.

IRENE. Take your glasses to the table. I'll bring in the soup.

AARON. Slip in, Millie. (*Indicates place at the dinette table.*) Irene keeps the place nearest the kitchen. Next to Millie, Claude.

MILLIE (*gets rid of apron and takes her place*). Isn't that a duckie centrepiece?

CLAUDE (*looking at his plate*). What interesting Italian ware.

IRENE (*enters with tray and four bowls of soup which she passes*). Please admire my soup bowls? Aren't they colorful?

MILLIE. Aren't they superfine soup full?

IRENE. Aaron, it's Millie's latest recipe. She made the *soup.*

AARON. Oh, she did. Well, Millie, if Irene goes off for a vacation, you may move right in and cook for *me.*

MILLIE. Oh, joy, Aaron, when do I pack?

IRENE. You can't push me out of this little Paradise. Nothing could blast me out of this jewel box of domestic happiness.

MILLIE. But I do want to move right in.

IRENE. If Aaron wants your cooking he can move out. I'd rather find another husband than lose my darling

frigidaire. Claude, it makes those lovely cubes of ice. (*Indicates glasses.*) No vulgar chopping. If Aaron deserts me, maybe *you'll* move in, Claude. You're tired of hotel life and the club, aren't you? (*Rises to take out soup plates.*)

MILLIE. I'll help you. (*Exeunt with Irene into kitchenette.*)

AARON. Yes, Claude, a man is only half alive without a home and a wife.

CLAUDE. But marriage is such a grab-bag risk.

AARON. Your flirtations fade out because you don't give them solid ground to grow on. If you had this little apartment and were married to any one of six attractive girls you'd be happier than you are now living alone.

CLAUDE. Regardless of love?

AARON. Love! You? Whatever capacity you had for that you have squandered. The best you can hope for now is to find some woman willing to adapt herself to your hardened ways. I'm loyal to my sex and what Irene said about you has made me hot.

CLAUDE. What was that?

AARON (*refuses to tell as Millie enters and places a planked steak before Aaron*).

IRENE (*follows with plates*). Careful, the plates are hot. (*Exit into kitchenette.*)

AARON (*rising to carve with pride*). You never get a steak like this, Claude, except at your own home table.

IRENE (*returns with bowl of salad*). Here's Aaron's donation of roses.

CLAUDE. Ah, what fragrance.

MILLIE. Do let me serve the salad.

AARON. Oh, the white rock. (*Exit to kitchenette.*)

IRENE (*sits at table and serves the meat*). Isn't Aaron a love? I let him putter in the kitchen all he wants to. You can live in a castle and have a hundred servants but nothing gives you a feeling of home like having your own little kitchen to fry eggs in.

MILLIE. I'd rather live in this apartment than in our whole big house.

IRENE (*calls*). Aaron, turn the gas off under the coffee.

AARON (*in the kitchenette does so and also makes a dive to kill something on the wall, finally succeeds in stepping on it*).

IRENE (*watching Millie serve the salad*). Doesn't Millie look like a high priestess dispensing the good things of life? I like that dress, Millie. You're getting younger every day. Don't throw yourself away on Tom Langner. He's too old.

CLAUDE. How old is he?

IRENE. Forty-nine.

CLAUDE (*hastily*). Forty-nine's not old.

IRENE. At forty-nine a bachelor has the marks.

CLAUDE. Marks of what?

IRENE. Marks of forty-nine.

CLAUDE. Well, I'm not forty-nine yet.

IRENE. Oh, aren't you?

CLAUDE. Irene, you *know* I'm not much older than Aaron.

IRENE. But Aaron is married. Married men last longer. Statistics prove that bachelors die earlier. Personally, I think all bachelors are dead at forty-nine only they don't know it.

CLAUDE. Irene!

AARON (*returns with high-balls and serves them*).

IRENE. Now Millie has had seven proposals this year. There is an artist madly in love with her. He thinks she has the most beautiful body —

MILLIE. Irene!

IRENE. Well, has Claude ever seen you in your bathing suit?

CLAUDE. I say, when do we go swimming?

IRENE. Another man, a widower with three children, thinks that Millie would make an ideal mother and housekeeper and then —

MILLIE. It's time for Millie to leave the room. (*Takes plates into kitchenette.*)

IRENE. I've only one fault to find with her, the same I find with you.

CLAUDE. Age?

IRENE. War marks.

CLAUDE (*with his hands to his ears*). How do you know she's got 'em?

IRENE. You are both tense. You try to be natural but you are on guard. You don't rest on your oars like rowers who have achieved some distance. You seem to be struggling to hold your own *against* the current.

CLAUDE. Too involved, please translate.

IRENE. Married couples have a way about them of having guided a ship safely into port.

CLAUDE. Yes, an *anchored* look.

IRENE. Safe, relaxed, in harbor.

CLAUDE. Most anchored ships I've seen seem to be straining at the leash in desperate desire to escape, their noses pointing to the sea.

IRENE. It's all in the point of view.

CLAUDE. Or in the direction of the nose.

IRENE (*startled*). Nose! Exactly, the nose!

MILLIE (*returns with fresh plates and goes out to kitchenette with Aaron to get the dessert*).

CLAUDE (*offers Irene a light for her cigarette*).

IRENE (*lingering over the action and looking steadily at Claude*). If you realized Millie's possibilities you would want to marry her if you could.

CLAUDE. Would we make a good match?

IRENE. You are very dense not to realize that she would flame like that!

CLAUDE. I have wondered.

IRENE. You are too slow. You'll put off deciding until your hour is over. In fact, I think it's over already.

CLAUDE. I'm only forty-eight. She's very much upstage herself.

IRENE. She wouldn't have you, though. It would be embarrassing if she knew I told you, but she was laughing about you —

CLAUDE. Laughing!

IRENE. It's not a joke to you and it made me furious. It made me more *loyal* to you. After all, you're Aaron's pal and near *his* age. I couldn't let Millie suggest that Aaron is old. It made me want to play a joke on Millie. You understand I have it sort of in for her! Millie has visions of living in an apartment like this with that handsome young Roscoe Blaine.

CLAUDE. He's not handsome.

IRENE. Millie thinks he is. That's why she laughs at you for being old.

CLAUDE (*seizes Irene's vanity mirror*). Do I look as old as that?

IRENE. She has counted the crow tracks around your eyes.

CLAUDE. I ought to wear my glasses all the time.

IRENE. She has noticed your reinforced tooth.

CLAUDE. Have I grinned too wide?

IRENE. She saw you yawn. Yawns are very disillusioning.

CLAUDE (*puts mirror down in disgust*). Pah!

IRENE. And the moth patch on your head. She said it reminded her of the worn-out patches in her caracul coat.

CLAUDE (*his hands to his head*). My barber insists it doesn't show.

IRENE. Then she said you looked pathetic.

CLAUDE (*in a rage*). Pathetic! *I?*

IRENE. Like a dog that lopes after a wagon, like the fifth tire on the back of an automobile, going everywhere, *belonging* nowhere!

CLAUDE (*rises angrily*). I'd like to pay her back for that!

IRENE. Her derisive laugh! But he laughs best who laughs last! If we could trap her into marrying you right away —

CLAUDE. Right away?

IRENE. You'd have the last laugh. There's a minister in the building. Aaron and I could move right out to an hotel, you could come right in here, and then the joke would be on Millie when she found herself married to you.

CLAUDE (*laughs*). Jove! What a joke on Millie to find herself married to me. It would teach that Roscoe Blaine a lesson for his insolence. He believes he's so damned good-looking.

IRENE. You ought to marry her to protect yourself. There's nothing more convincing than ridicule, and if

it ever got to the club that Millie had turned you down —

CLAUDE. Gosh, Irene, I need whiskey, straight. (*Takes glass.*)

MILLIE (*enters from kitchenette with dessert while Aaron follows with the silver coffee service and tray*). Claude, here's the most delicious dessert, preserved cantaloupe from France. You eat it with cream cheese.

AARON. And crackers.

MILLIE. Celestial manna! I'm always hunting for new foods to relieve monotony. One gets so tired of the old things.

IRENE. Old things! (*Nudges Claude as he eats a cracker.*)

CLAUDE (*chokes and coughs*).

AARON. Slap him on the back. (*Does so.*)

IRENE. Stand up.

MILLIE. Hold up your arms.

IRENE. Take him to the window. Give him air.

CLAUDE (*revives and returns to the table*). I beg your pardon. (*Gasps.*) Just a cracker crumb.

AARON. Take this. (*Offers his high-ball.*)

MILLIE. Your epiglottis didn't close fast enough.

IRENE. Millie says you aren't fast enough, Claude.

MILLIE. Oh, Irene, you're so funny.

IRENE (*motions to Millie to laugh*).

MILLIE. Ha, ha.

CLAUDE. I don't see anything funny.

IRENE (*making herself laugh and encouraging Millie to continue*). Oh, I do, she told me she wanted to elope with Roscoe Blaine and I told her she can't elope and that's what she was thinking of when she brought it in.

MILLIE. Ha, ha, oh, Irene, you are so funny!

IRENE. But after all we'll make her do it, but do it with you — and then we'll see who's going to laugh! Millie, Claude wants you to elope with him right away.

CLAUDE. But — but —

MILLIE (*gets hysterical*).

IRENE (*talks very fast*). You don't understand, Millie, Claude wants you to marry him, but he hasn't the nerve, so I'm holding his — I mean, I'm proposing for him — do you take sugar in your coffee, Claude — Millie, you'd better hurry.

MILLIE (*rises startled by the sudden situation and goes into what seems to be laughing hysterics*).

AARON. She's choking!

IRENE. No, Claude, she's *laughing!*

CLAUDE (*seizes Millie roughly*). What's funny about my marrying you? What are you so proud about? Because you're thirteen years younger or whatever your damn age is! I've had women younger than you trying to marry me. They didn't seem to think I was just a left-over. Do you think I'm worse off than that silly Roscoe Blaine, and as for your running a widower's house, you

won't have to be a second wife living against the records of the first.

IRENE (*has beckoned Aaron to tiptoe into the kitchenette where they stand listening and enjoying the situation*).

CLAUDE (*talks very fast in his desire to re-establish his self-esteem*). And as for giving you things, you can have as many kitchenettes as you want, we'll move in here and put them out! Stop laughing, Millie. (*His hands feel the softness of her.*) You haven't any right to laugh at me. I let myself get seedy because I was a coward about women. All of them seem to be trying to get all they can from a man without wanting to give him anything. You're the first woman who hasn't *tried* to *get* me! Stop laughing! You're not so cold yourself that I can't have some power over you. I'll *make* — (*Kisses her with emotional roughness.*) Millie, you've got to marry me! Stop laughing!

MILLIE (*flings her arms about his neck*). Oh, Claude, I'm not laughing — I'm *crying!* (*Crumples into his sheltering arms.*)

AARON (*whispers to Irene*). Is it quite fair to trap them in a place like this?

IRENE. Ssh, they won't see anything while love is *blind!* (*There's the sound of a click near them.*)

IRENE (*jumps aside, holding up her skirt and gazing in terror at the mouse trap under the cupboard*). Oh!

AARON (*with a tone of pride and exultation as he embraces Irene*). Ah! Caught!

CURTAIN

GOOD MEDICINE

BY

JACK ARNOLD AND EDWIN BURKE

CHARACTERS

HARRY GRAVES, *A Young Doctor*
VERA GRAVES, *His Wife*
HETTY SAGE, *A Patient*

SCENE: *Living-room and office of the doctor.*

TIME: *Twelve o'clock — lunch time.*

GOOD MEDICINE

The scene is the living-room and office of doctor, in the suburbs of a city. It is poorly furnished, and contains the furniture and paraphernalia of both the home and the office. While all furniture is cheap and well worn showing straitened condition of the occupants, everything is neat and clean — a compliment to the wife.

As the curtain rises, the wife is searching among the empty dishes on the tables. She turns and looks about the room, and then searches in the cupboard and icebox, revealing to the audience that both are devoid of food. The telephone rings, she answers.

WIFE. Hello — What? — Grocery store? — Why no, this is the office of Dr. Graves. — That's all right. (*Hangs up and again starts searching for bread. Dr. Graves enters with apron on and frying pan in hand. He has just fried an egg.*)

DOCTOR. Who was it? Was it for me?

WIFE. Wrong number. Harry, what did you do with that loaf of bread?

DOCTOR. Why, I think I put it in the bookcase.

WIFE. Always the bookcase! What do you think we have a cupboard for?

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DOCTOR (*absent-mindedly*). I don't know. Are you sure that phone wasn't for me?

WIFE. Quite sure.

DOCTOR. That's funny. I have been expecting a very important phone call. Are you sure that wasn't for me?

WIFE. Of course I'm sure. (*Takes bread from bookcase.*) Why, Harry, what's the matter? You've seemed so nervous all day.

DOCTOR (*sits*). Well, isn't it enough to make a fellow nervous, his wife living in a doctor's office because he can't support her in a home?

WIFE. What has that to do with the phone call?

DOCTOR. I've been a doctor for five months and in five months I've earned $11.00. Think of it. I studied eight years to fit myself for a job that pays me two dollars and twenty cents a month! (*Points to kitchen.*) And look at that operating room in there. What have I ever operated on? A cold storage hen egg, that's all. (*He tosses the egg up and down in the frying pan.*)

WIFE (*pats him on shoulder*). Harry, you know that every young doctor has to struggle, and because we're poor we have to struggle a little bit harder, that's all. The success that isn't worth fighting for isn't worth having, and besides you've had some practice. (*She stands above the table and begins placing the plates, etc., for lunch.*)

DOCTOR. Yes, a lot of practice. Pawning my medical books.

WIFE (*she turns*). You've been selling your library?

DOCTOR. Well, I didn't want to tell you, but we have been eating on my books for a month. Yesterday I sold "Kravette's Stomach Trouble," and bought the frankfurters. The eggs came out of "Oppenheim's Discussion of Microbes." If we are going to eat tomorrow I will have to sell "Biber's Explanation of Asthma."

WIFE. Oh, Harry! Now suppose you have patients come in with stomach trouble or asthma — without your book, how would you know how to treat them?

DOCTOR. I'd recommend the frankfurters. They cured me of my stomach trouble.

WIFE. You must be patient, Harry. Things are bound to pick up. Why, people are getting sick every day. (*She continues her work.*)

DOCTOR. Where are they? I don't meet them. The only people I come in contact with are so darned healthy they make me sick. Oh, I know you have to fight to make a success, but somehow I can't fight on an empty stomach. I'm a husky guy with a man's sized appetite and there's nothing that makes me so hungry as going without food.

WIFE. Going without food?

DOCTOR. Yes, going without food. My type of physique seems to require groceries. (*Sits on edge of desk.*)

WIFE. Why, Harry, when you came home last night you said you'd been dining with a friend at the hotel.

DOCTOR. Well I —

WIFE. You didn't have anything at all to eat.

DOCTOR. Well, there wasn't enough here for two of us and I knew you were hungry.

WIFE (*puts arm over his shoulder, and speaks tenderly*). You sacrificed yourself so that I could have both the frankfurters. Oh, Harry, I'll fix you the most wonderful lunch!

DOCTOR. Fine! (*He rises with expectation and watches her. She rattles all the empty dishes in the cupboard.*) Somehow just rattling empty dishes never did satisfy my appetite. (*Again sits on table disappointed.*)

WIFE. Well — (*Still searching about, she spies the bread on table*). First, we'll start with the bread!

DOCTOR. Stale bread!

WIFE. It isn't so bad.

DOCTOR. I don't like stale bread unless it's freshly baked.

WIFE. But what about that pan of rice pudding we bought at the lunch counter on the corner last Monday?

DOCTOR. What! (*Rises.*)

WIFE. Why, Harry, it's only three days old. (*Exit.*)

DOCTOR (*shouting*). Rice pudding! That's all we have had for a week. Rice pudding!

WIFE (*enters with pan of rice pudding*). Harry, we still have enough for five days more. (*She shows it gleefully.*)

DOCTOR. Holy Smoke!

WIFE. Oh, please don't be discouraged. I know you are going to make a wonderful success as a doctor. It's merely a matter of waiting and hoping.

DOCTOR. Yes, waiting until I starve to death, and hoping that I won't. (*Looks out of window.*) Well, I hope I get that phone call, that's all I hope.

WIFE. Just get the napkins. (*Doctor reaches outside of door and gets a small face towel. Wife takes towel.*) Where's your napkin?

DOCTOR. I used it this morning when I took a bath.

WIFE. Then I'll get you one of my handkerchiefs. You must be careful and don't spill anything on your clothes.

DOCTOR. Stale bread would wash out anyway.

WIFE. Did you fix the eggs?

DOCTOR. The what?

WIFE. Why, the eggs?

DOCTOR. We have no eggs for lunch.

WIFE. Why, of course we have eggs. There's one of them you've already fried.

DOCTOR (*looks at egg, which he has been carrying about all the while*). This isn't one of them. This is it.

WIFE. You mean there's only one egg?

DOCTOR. A egg. A individual, lonely and disconsolate egg.

WIFE (*a hopeless little laugh, laying the towel across him arm*). Oh, it's all right. You must eat it, because I'm not the least bit hungry anyway. (*Trying to be cheerful.*)

DOCTOR. Oh no! I pulled that stunt last night. You eat the egg. (*Throwing the towel across her arm.*)

WIFE (*remonstrating*). But I don't like eggs.

DOCTOR. And I hate eggs. And if there's anything I hate worse than eggs it's a single egg. And if there's anything I hate worse than a single egg it's second hand rice pudding. Now you eat the egg. I've lost my appetite. (*Sits.*)

WIFE (*dumps egg out of pan on to a plate. Looks at it, then takes it up and smells it*). What did you fry it in? — that grease in the can?

DOCTOR. No, I fried it in the grease in that jar there. (*Points to a white jar on the cupboard.*) What's the matter with it?

WIFE. Harry, you fried this egg in some of my cold cream.

DOCTOR (*rises*). *What!* Well, this settles it. (*Bangs the table and gets cap.*) I will not stand this state of affairs any longer.

WIFE. Where are you going?

DOCTOR. I'm going to get a job and get some food. I simply will not stay around here with one fried egg and a hunk of rice pudding. (*Phone rings. He takes up receiver.*) Hello — What? — Well, sure, anything — All right, I'll be right over. (*Hangs up.*) That's the call. Tom Stewart got me a job in a grocery store. I am to be the errand boy.

WIFE. That's ridiculous.

DOCTOR. No it isn't. Now I'll go over and select a bill of groceries. They'll trust me because I work for the firm. The first order I deliver will be my own groceries.

WIFE. Harry, you are going to give up your career?

DOCTOR. No, I'm just going to give up my empty stomach. (*Picks up book in arm-chair.*) Hello! Here's Johnson's "Anatomy." I thought I got rid of that long ago. I'll sell this and buy some meat. Won't it be great! For the first time we'll have a regular meal. Groceries and meat and everything! Gee! (*Suddenly stops.*) I'd better go the back way. (*Crosses to door.*)

WIFE. Why the back way?

DOCTOR. That's the way I feel. And I'm going to keep on using the back way until I'm a success in life. (*Exit.*)

WIFE. Harry, please don't go. (*But Doctor is gone. She stands for a moment, and then begins to sniffle. Door-bell rings. She crosses to window, looks out and sees patient, covers dishes quickly with towel, takes nurse's apron out of bookcase and puts it on and exits. Speaks off stage.*) Good afternoon, Madam.

HETTY (*off stage*). Don't you ever answer your bell? (*Enters.*)

WIFE. Did you have to wait long?

HETTY. I've been ringing for hours and anyone can see the terrible state of health I'm in. (*Fretfully.*)

WIFE (*with rising hope*). You mean you're ill?

HETTY. Ill? What would I come to a doctor for if I weren't ill?

WIFE (*runs to door quickly*). Oh Harry! Harre-e-e! (*Putting her in the arm-chair.*) Sit down. Sit right down. He has gone to the corner. He'll be back in just a minute.

HETTY. Who are you?

WIFE (*almost worshipping her*). I'm the doctor's nurse.

HETTY. Is he sick too?

WIFE. No. I mean I am employed here as a nurse. And you?

HETTY. I am Mrs. Sage. I am a very sick woman. I have ailments enough to keep any doctor busy the rest of his life.

WIFE (*runs to door again*). Harre-e-e! ! ! Why didn't you come five minutes sooner!

HETTY. Well, if this doctor is out, I will go to the one across the street. (*Rises.*)

WIFE (*rushes to her and puts her in the chair again*). Oh no, you mustn't do that. You see, this doctor specializes in just the diseases you have. So just wait a moment and he'll be right back. What do you feel is the matter with you?

HETTY. There are a lot of things the matter with me. I have Bright's Disease.

WIFE. You have? (*Claps hands.*) Isn't that splendid —I mean splendid that you came to a doctor in time.

HETTY. I'm sure I have heart trouble.

WIFE. Really?

HETTY. And I know I'm tubercular.

WIFE. Well! Well! Well! (*To window and looks out for Doctor.*)

HETTY. I am in a frightful state of health.

WIFE. Oh, if you only knew what the doctor is going to do for you.

HETTY. Is the doctor out?

WIFE. Just to the corner. He'll be right back. He is greatly in demand.

HETTY. He is busy then.

WIFE. Oh, very busy. His practice is such that he attends only the most important cases. Why, he's hardly eaten a thing in two days. But I'll do my best to interest him in you, although I'm sure he'll consider your troubles merely slight ailments.

HETTY (*rises, explosively*). Bright's Disease! Heart trouble! *Tuberculosis!!* He considers slight ailments? Well, what would I have to have for him to consider me sick?

WIFE (*carelessly*). Oh, the doctor never considers a patient sick until he dies.

HETTY. What!!! (*As if to exit.*)

WIFE. Oh, please don't go. He'll be right back. Just now he is performing an important operation. He is trying to remove some things — He is trying to remove some things from the man that runs that grocery store over there. He'll be right back.

DOCTOR (*off stage, speaking as he enters*). Well, here I am, honey, and I got eggs, two pounds of bacon, sugar, a peck of potatoes and a yeast cake. (*He enters in grocer's cap and apron, with basket of groceries in left hand, a sack of potatoes swung over his right shoulder and a small package in his right hand. He*

does not stop, but drops the basket on the desk as he passes below it and exits into kitchen.)

HETTY (*rises as he enters and falls back in chair when he has finished*). What an operation!

WIFE (*as if nothing was wrong*). But why bring those things in at the front door, dear?

DOCTOR (*off*). Because when I can round up a flock of groceries like these, I can afford to come in at the front door. I'm a success in life. (*He has left the potatoes and now enters holding up the small package.*) And I turned Johnson's "Anatomy" into a Hamburg steak. (*Crosses to ice-box, lifts lid, and puts steak inside, keeping his back toward Hetty, whom he has not seen.*)

WIFE. I am very glad to hear the operation was a success.

DOCTOR (*faces wife, holding lid of ice-chest open*). Operation! What are you talking about?

WIFE. Doctor, if you can spare just a moment, a patient is here who needs your immediate attention.

DOCTOR (*sees Hetty for the first time. He instantly snatches off his cap, jerks off apron, and seizes appointment book from vest pocket. He then begins looking through book calmly as if nothing had happened*). Well — I am a very busy man. I shall have to make several calls. Let me see who my next patient is.

WIFE. This is Mrs. Sage. She has everything.

DOCTOR. How do you do, Mrs. Sage.

HETTY. Are you the doctor?

DOCTOR. Yes, I am Dr. Graves.

HETTY. Graves? I don't think I like that name. (*Starts to go.*)

WIFE. Oh, no, you mustn't go. You are not able to go. After all, you're in a very *grave* condition.

HETTY. Grave! Grave! Is that all you can talk about when a patient comes in? And what was that grave remark about turning Johnson's "Anatomy" into a Hamburg steak?

DOCTOR. That was just a professional term. You see — Hamburg steak being ground up —

HETTY. You mean to say you ground a man *up?*

DOCTOR. No, no, I mean that — after treating him, he — he was all right from the *ground* up.

HETTY. Oh!

WIFE. Sit down, Mrs. Sage. (*Pushes her into chair, then adjusts Doctor's chair for him.*) Doctor, Mrs. Sage would like to consult you about two or three of her diseases.

DOCTOR. Two or three? (*Sits.*) Well, now — uh — Mrs. Sage, what seems to be the trouble?

HETTY. First of all, my appetite.

DOCTOR. Appetite? (*Glances quickly at her, then at the basket of groceries on the desk.*) Pardon me just a moment. (*Picks up basket of groceries, and hands it to wife, who exits. Doctor rubbing his hands in satisfaction.*) You were speaking about *your* appetite.

HETTY. It's gone. I tried to tempt myself with little dainties. But it's no use. I can't find a thing to eat.

DOCTOR. You can't find a thing to eat?

HETTY. No.

DOCTOR. I know how to sympathize with you, Mrs. Sage. I have been in the same predicament for a month.

HETTY. You have? What did you take?

DOCTOR. Well, I took a job — er — that is, a job-lot of things. (*Glances at kitchen.*)

HETTY. Did they help you?

DOCTOR. I don't think I shall suffer any more.

HETTY. Oh, you must give those same things to me.

DOCTOR. Excuse me. (*Takes key from pocket and hands it through door to wife.*) There's the key to the grocery room.

HETTY. Oh, Doctor, I know you're going to find me in a terrible state of health. I am certain I have Bright's Disease. (*Wife enters.*)

DOCTOR. Oh no. You don't show the slightest indication of Bright's Disease.

WIFE. Doctor, are you sure she hasn't Bright's Disease?

DOCTOR. Well, if she had Bright's Disease there would be —

HETTY (*rises*). How dare you stand there and tell me I haven't Bright's Disease!

DOCTOR. Well, being a doctor, I know that —

HETTY. You don't know the first thing about it.

DOCTOR. Why, I can see —

WIFE. Doctor, if the lady knows she has Bright's Disease, then of course she has it. (*Nudges him.*)

HETTY. Of course I have it. I inherited it from my father.

DOCTOR. Oh well, if you inherited it, then of course you have a right to it.

HETTY (*stubbornly*). I know what I've got. I am a rich woman. I can afford to have anything I want. I have been to three specialists and each one of them has assured me I have Bright's Disease. Do you know Dr. Wardell?

DOCTOR. The society specialist? Yes.

HETTY. He made a test of my blood, and he found absolute evidence that I had Bright's Disease. He charged me $3,000 for a treatment. I always pay a large fee for each of my diseases.

WIFE. Doctor, perhaps the lady is suffering from something else. (*Gets stethoscope and brings it to Doctor.*)

HETTY. Oh yes. I am tubercular. (*Sits coughing.*)

DOCTOR. Tubercular?

HETTY. Yes, I know I am.

DOCTOR (*examines Hetty's chest with stethoscope*). Now say "ah."

HETTY. *Ah!!!*

DOCTOR. I thought so.

HETTY. That proves it, doesn't it?

DOCTOR. Yes. (*Gives stethoscope to wife.*) That proves conclusively that you haven't got it.

HETTY. What! Not even tuberculosis? Then what have I got?

DOCTOR (*leaning on desk, ignoring her question*). Now about your appetite.

HETTY (*sinks into chair with hands on stomach*). Oh, Doctor, I can't eat a thing.

DOCTOR. What did you have for breakfast this morning?

HETTY. Hardly anything. Just eggs, rolls and coffee.

DOCTOR. How many eggs?

HETTY. Four.

DOCTOR (*puts hand on stomach, beginning to get hungry*). And rolls?

HETTY. Just made myself eat them. I had six.

DOCTOR (*seems to taste the breakfast*). And that is all?

HETTY. I did try to eat some sausages. Four small ones.

DOCTOR (*exasperated with hunger*). That hardly seems enough.

HETTY. Do you think I should eat more?

DOCTOR. Do you think you could? (*Begins searching through drawer for prescription blanks.*)

HETTY. I'll try. I have an appetite like a bird.

DOCTOR (*still searching, he half talks to himself*). Even birds differ in appetites. There's the canary — and then there's the ostrich.

HETTY. I am a busy woman. I must eat. I have a large correspondence. I can't write letters on an empty stomach.

DOCTOR (*still searching and mumbling to himself*). I wonder if she ever tried using a desk. (*He finds the prescription blanks, takes out pencil, sits, and starts to write. Then stops, rises and slams blanks on desk.*)

WIFE (*crosses upper left corner of desk*). Doctor, aren't you going to prescribe for the lady?

HETTY. Well, if you can't find anything wrong with me I shall go to a doctor who can. (*Starts to rise from chair.*) Oh my heart! My heart! (*Sinks back again.*)

WIFE (*crosses upper side of Hetty. Doctor crosses right of her.*) Yes, it is your heart. Sit down.

HETTY. Oh, doctor, I am a poor suffering woman.

DOCTOR (*to wife*). Get me the thermometer. (*Feels Hetty's pulse. Wife crosses upper right, gets thermometer, crosses to Doctor, gives it to him, and crosses above to left of Hetty. Doctor sticks it in Hetty's mouth.*) Your pulse is fine. (*Examines thermometer.*)

Mrs. Sage — (*Doctor backs a step or so.*)

HETTY (*rises*). Oh, doctor, tell me the truth. I want to know the worst.

DOCTOR. I am sorry to disappoint you, but your heart is in wonderful condition.

HETTY. Doctor, I know there's something wrong with me.

DOCTOR. There is. There's something radically wrong with you. I see it now. But for a moment you baffled me.

WIFE. Oh doctor, I was sure you would discover something.

HETTY. I've come to the right place after all.

DOCTOR. Yes.

HETTY. What's the matter with me?

DOCTOR. You're cuckoo.

HETTY. What?

DOCTOR. In medical language, you are a hypochondriac.

HETTY. What is that?

DOCTOR. A hypochondriac is a person who thinks she is ill. That's what you are, a hypochondriac. You think you're ill, and because you have money you engage doctors who kid you along in the hope of getting some of your money away from you. That Dr. Wardell for instance, who said you had $3,000 worth of Bright's Disease.

HETTY. He's one of the most fashionable doctors.

DOCTOR. And what makes him a fashionable doctor? Women of wealth go to him. Why do they go to him? Because he's good looking, has a fine office and wears stylish clothes.

HETTY. You think those things would appeal to me?

DOCTOR. They'd appeal to any woman who is *half* a fool.

HETTY. Am I *half* a fool?

DOCTOR. I didn't say that. (*Hetty smiles and sits.*) You are ninety per cent.

HETTY. You young Jackanapes! (*Crosses violently to door.*)

DOCTOR. Wait a minute! (*She stops. The doctor becomes aggressive.*) You came here to find out what's the matter with you and I'm going to tell you. And what's more I'm going to charge you for the information. If Dr. Wardell can charge you, then so can I. (*Snatches up pad and pencil and begins figuring feverishly.*)

HETTY. No man has talked like this to me before.

DOCTOR (*still figuring*). Then no man has ever done his duty to you before. I'm going to tell you right now what your bill is. (*He figures and half mumbles the items.*) Peck of potatoes, 45 cents — eggs, 60 cents — Hamburger steak etc. — two pounds bacon, etc. — sugar, yeast cake, etc. — (*Throws bill on desk before her.*) There! I am going to charge you three dollars and ten cents.

HETTY (*surprised at the small amount*). What! Three dollars and ten cents?

DOCTOR (*defending the huge charge*). Yes, and that's not charging you for the use of the thermometer and stethoscope.

WIFE. Harry, don't forget you're a doctor.

HETTY. Do you know who I am? I am Hetty Sage.

WIFE. The millionairess whose name is in the papers every day?

HETTY. That's just who I am.

DOCTOR. You're Hetty Sage who owns all the railroads?

HETTY. Yes, and if I were such a fool as you say I am, how could I have amassed the fortune I have?

DOCTOR. You have a couple of million dollars.

HETTY. I have more than that.

DOCTOR (*seizes the bill and adds another item*). The use of the thermometer and stethoscope will be sixty-five cents extra. (*Puts bill down again.*)

HETTY. And now I suppose you will want to examine me again.

DOCTOR (*slams the desk angrily*). No. I wouldn't prostitute my profession for all your money. It's true I didn't know who you were, but now that you have some of my opinion you can have it all. You're healthier than I am. You only like the thought of being sick. You enjoy bad health. The papers say you are clever, so you decided to have Bright's Disease. To get sympathy, you become tubercular.

HETTY. But I do have pains in my stomach.

DOCTOR. I should think you would have pains in your stomach. Four eggs, two cups of coffee, six rolls and four pounds of sausages.

HETTY. You are not a regular doctor. (*Turning to wife.*) And you are not a nurse, you are that man's wife.

WIFE (*wilting*). It is true I am not a nurse, but he is a regular doctor all right, Mrs. Sage. The trouble is he hasn't been making any money. Why, sometimes we haven't even enough to eat.

DOCTOR. And I love my profession too much to lie to you about your condition. Why, an honest doctor has a real mission in life. To help the sick, to alleviate pain, to relieve suffering. I'd rather be a poor poverty-stricken doctor who honestly helps invalids to get well, than the most fashionable physician in town getting rich off the silliness of women like you.

HETTY. You think I am silly?

DOCTOR (*roaring*). Silly? No! I think you're a blatant idiot! You think you're sick? Why, I performed an operation on a man yesterday. He didn't have any money to pay me and I didn't have any patients, so it was fifty-fifty. He was injured on the railroad. I amputated his leg. There he lies, a wife and three children, and they have six dollars between them and starvation. He's a working man with a leg gone and yet he smiles in the face of his misfortunes. And you think you're sick. Compare yourself to him and be ashamed.

HETTY. But the doctors tell me I am.

DOCTOR. I tried to get him into that new Riverview Hospital.

HETTY. That's my hospital. I built it.

DOCTOR. Good heavens! Did you build a hospital all for yourself?

HETTY. I built it for the employees of the Riverview Railroad.

WIFE. That man worked for your railroad.

DOCTOR. Do you think I could get him into your hospital? No. That Dr. Fordyce told me he didn't care for any such messy cases.

HETTY. I'll see that they take him in.

DOCTOR. You will. All right. And for that I'll write you a prescription (*Crosses to desk and sits.*)

WIFE (*to Hetty*). Don't mind the doctor. His empty stomach has gone to his head.

DOCTOR (*door-bell rings*). There's someone at the door. (*Wife exits. Doctor starts to write prescription.*)

HETTY. What do I want a prescription for? You said there was nothing the matter with me.

DOCTOR (*writing fast*). I was wrong. There's a lot the matter with you. It's in your mind. But don't worry, I can cure you because your heart is in the right place. (*Finishes writing and hands her the paper.*) Follow those instructions carefully and in a week you won't know yourself. It's good medicine.

HETTY (*reads*). "Cut out pills. Thank God for the health he has given you. Take three hearty laughs each day." (*Wife enters.*)

WIFE. There's a man from the grocery store to say that you waste too much time on your errands. You're discharged.

DOCTOR. Discharged?

WIFE. And he says he wants his basket.

HETTY (*breaks into uproarious laughter, sinking into arm-chair*).

DOCTOR (*turning*). What's the matter?

HETTY. I'm taking some of your medicine. That's the first good laugh I've had today. (*Again roaring with laughter.*)

DOCTOR. I prescribed those laughs for you, not for me.

WIFE (*to Hetty*). If you only knew what it meant to go without anything to eat, you might not think it was so funny. (*She begins to cry.*)

HETTY. I'm not laughing at you, my dear child, but at the idiots who said there wasn't an honest doctor to be had in town. (*Turns to Doctor.*) I'm rich because I had sense enough to be what the newspapers call eccentric. Well, this is one of my eccentricities. I need a physician for the Chief-of-staff in my new Riverview hospital. I've been interviewing doctors for the past three days and you're the first one I found who hasn't said I needed treatment because I have money. I need treatment? Why, I'm as healthy as a ten ton truck. (*Gestures vigorously.*)

DOCTOR. And your visit here was just a trick?

HETTY. I am a business woman. The Chief-of-staff gets $15,000 a year. Do you want the job?

DOCTOR. Yes! (*Wheels front in an ecstatic dream, a position which he holds through the following scene.*)

HETTY (*speaking rapidly*). Here's a check for $1,000. Do you want it?

DOCTOR. Yes!

HETTY. You know where my office is?

DOCTOR. Yes!

HETTY. Can you be there at 3.30 sharp?

DOCTOR. Yes!

HETTY. Can I count on you?

DOCTOR. Yes!

HETTY. Then I'll see you again. (*Crosses to door.*)

DOCTOR. Yes!

HETTY (*turns, taking bill from purse*). Oh, I owe something for that prescription. Here's ten dollars. You might want to take your little wife out to dinner. Good-by. (*She waves her hand and exits.*)

DOCTOR. Yes!

WIFE (*grabs him*). Harry, are we dreaming?

DOCTOR. Yes!— (*He has been facing front all the while in an ecstatic dream. He now wakes up, grabs his wife and waltzes her around in wild joy.*) No!!! *It's true!* It's true!!It's !!!

WIFE (*as the waltz stops, she grabs check and looks at it*). Harry, a $1,000 check! Think of all we can buy with this!

DOCTOR (*grabs bill Hetty left*). Think of all we can buy with this. Beef steak smothered with onions. Get

that apron off. (*He tears it loose. Wife pulls off apron and throws it in kitchen. Doctor grabs hat from hat-tree.*)

WIFE. Lobster salad, oozing with dressing.

DOCTOR. Ice cream and cake, Oooo! (*Both with hands on stomach, say Ooo.*) Hurry up. (*Rushes to table, grabs pan of rice pudding, hurls it through window.*)

WIFE. Harry!

DOCTOR. Come on, let's go! (*Grabs wife, and both rush out gleefully, as curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

GOD WINKS

BY

KATHARINE STANBERY BURGESS

THE CHARACTERS

WILLIAM GOWER, *an old man. This old gentleman is seventy-two years old: once a fine figure of a man, strong and erect, but now stooping and shuffling a very little bit. He has the combination of vigor and weakness often seen in men of that age; and his temper, too, is alternately mellow and irascible. He is clean, but his clothes are out-of-date and baggy: he evidently delights in wearing the oldest things he has. His shirt and collar are white but limp, and he wears an old black string tie. His hair and whiskers are thin and grizzled; his eyes are big and bright, by turns childlike and crafty. Having outlived his usefulness in the world, he has shut himself up in his castle with his ideals, on which he feeds. Incidentally, his assertions that he does not lie, cheat nor swear, are quite sincere: he is really unconscious of any transgressions.*

JANE CORRIGAN, *his housekeeper. Here is the traditional faithful family servant: a strong, unbeautiful Irishwoman of about fifty-five, who is shrewd, practical, humorous, tender, sometimes testy. While the old man is really her spoiled child, she has imbibed most of his ideals — perhaps more for his sake than for theirs. And she is going to fight for them. Strangely enough, however, though she has lived with him long enough to know all his whims and crotchets, he has the power sometimes to frighten her when it comes to a question of right and wrong, sin and punishment.*

Her antagonism to Margaret Gower is always very near the surface: no love has ever been lost between them. The tang of brogue in Jane's voice and speech does not approach the low comedy point — and neither does Jane herself, at any time whatever.

Margaret Gower, *the old man's daughter-in-law. You could not insult this lady more successfully than by telling her that she is not a lady; but such is the sad truth. Without background, without the milk of human kindness, without honesty, charity or humor, see what a poor imitation she is! She has lived, for some thirty-eight years, a narrow, middle-class life, leaning on her Church (one of the Protestant denominations), but adorning that Church very little in the way of high ideals and probity. All this shows in her set and determined face and her usually hard voice; but, being an opportunist, she can, when she has an end in view, put honey into her tones and feign suavity and filial affection almost successfully. And now she wants to do a bit of social climbing through a bit of patriotic posing. Margaret knows how to dress, and her clothes are neither better nor worse than those of the average woman.*

Clyde Ransom, *an authority on Americana. Mr. Ransom probably has a strong individuality when he is in his own sphere; but this morning he is cast in the role of consulting engineer in a crooked deal — though quite innocently and without blame. He is of any age between thirty and fifty, and is immaculately dressed, well polished and presentable —all that is desirable. Needless to say, this is a very trying and embarrassing experience for him.*

GOD WINKS

SCENE: *the living-room in William Gower's house, in a small Massachusetts town.* TIME: *a quarter before nine on the morning of Washington's Birthday.*

It is an old-fashioned room, practical and plain and somewhat shabby, but very cheerful, and showing a feminine touch. There are doors in the middle of the right and left walls, the former leading to the dining-room and the latter to the hall. In the back wall, at equal distances from the middle, are large windows with small panes, curtained in white muslin and with old-style cornices or valances. Potted plants stand on the sills. Near the window right stands a big, old secretary or desk, with pigeonholes and small drawers above and a closing lid, and large drawers below. In front of this is a desk chair, and farther front, right, is a big arm-chair, its back to the dining-room door. There is another large chair, opposite it, at left. A sofa is in upper left corner, a table with a lamp (not to be lighted), books and ornaments in upper right corner, and one or two other chairs disposed at pleasure. The floor is covered with a rag rug; there are a few engravings and other pictures on the walls; curious old pottery figures are on the top of the desk. Everything is ancestral.

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But here is the crowning glory of the room. In the exact middle of the back wall, between the windows, there hangs, rather high, a very large portrait of George Washington: possibly a black-and-white reproduction of the unfinished Gilbert Stuart. Beneath this, a little above the level of the eye, hangs a small shelf or cabinet: if the latter, it must have only a single door. It has two small tacks fastened to the front edge. Inside it, or on the shelf, are seen a Cup and Saucer of Royal Worcester porcelain. Under this shrine there is a rather small stand, with a cover, on which rest two or three books — probably American histories.

NOTE. — *The tempo is spirited, with only occasional ritards and pauses. No comic note is to be forced or stressed: all the comedy is unconscious — an undertone (or overtone) of the grim poignancy of the plot.*

Old Mr. Gower is found sitting at his desk, showing left profile. He has before him a black tin box, from which he takes money — gold and greenbacks —, stacking and counting it aloud. There is a note of glee in his voice, and something of avarice.

GOWER. Five hundred and ten — five hundred and twenty — five hundred and forty — yes, by cracky, I was right the first time! I *knew* I was right! (*Suddenly a thought strikes him. He pulls out his watch and gives a start. He thrusts the money into the box and slams down the lid.*) Jane — Jane! . . . *Jane!* . . . Damn that woman — what's keeping her? . . . *Jane!*

JANE'S VOICE (*from right*). Yes, Mr. Gower! I'm comin' — in a minute!

GOWER (*roaring*). Well, why the devil don't you hurry? It's nearly nine o'clock!

JANE'S VOICE. All right, all right! (*Then Jane herself appears right, holding in front of her a silk American flag, eighteen or twenty inches long.*) Sure, I've got it all pressed nice and flat, now — it's all ready for you, Mr. Gower.

GOWER (*getting up*). Well, you've been a long time about it. A quarter to nine on General Washington's birthday, and the flag not up! When my dear wife was living, the flag was always pressed and ready before breakfast. She was a woman that knew her duty and gloried in it!

JANE. Sure, an' this is the first time in all the ten years *I've* been keepin' house for you that *I've* been late; but I've been that rushed this mornin'!

GOWER. Well, well — you're a good girl, Jane. Give me the flag. (*Jane gives him the flag, but she does not look him in the eyes. She is trying to cover some worry and perturbation. Gower stands with the flag in his hands.*) Jane, who was at the door while I was eating my breakfast?

JANE. Why — a — just a man, sure.

GOWER (*insistently*). What did he want?

JANE. Why, he — he —

GOWER. Damn it — out with it!

JANE (*tersely, seeing no way out of it*). It was the postman.

GOWER. Postman, hey — at this time of the morning?

JANE (*busy straightening various articles of furniture that are already straight*). Yes, sir — special delivery

— for me. . . . I'm after thinkin' this rug ought to be turned around.

GOWER. What business have *you* getting special deliveries? . . . Where did it come from?

JANE. Oh, Mr. Gower, don't be askin' me — now. Let's get the flag hung. I'll tell you another time.

GOWER (*looking down at the flag*). By cracky, you're right, Jane: it's late. . . . Jane, did you ever notice that I never say "by George"? Like other men?

JANE (*with amusement*). Yes, sir.

GOWER (*impressively*). Jane, when I was a boy, back in the eighteen sixties, I and the other boys used to say "by cracky!" And Jane, I've trained myself to say it ever since. Do you know why?

JANE. Yes, sir.

GOWER. It's because I won't take the name of George in vain. That's why! When you understand —

JANE (*dryly*). Lord love you, Mr. Gower, you've told me at least once a week for the last ten years.

GOWER (*irascibly*). Yes, and I'll tell you again as often as I please, damn it! I'll tell you that I don't swear by the sacred name of George Washington! (*Then, his voice trailing off:*) I'm not a profane man anyways . . . by God.

JANE (*smiling*). All right, Mr. Gower; sure an' I understand.

GOWER (*suddenly melting*). Well, come on, Janey. . . . Are these loops all right? And the tacks in firm? (*They*

move back to the Washington Shrine.) Now you stand at attention. (*With trembling hands, he hangs the flag on tacks that are already fixed in the lower edge of the cabinet, and then steps back, surveying it reverently.*) Jane, do you realize what that flag means?

JANE. Yes, sir.

GOWER (*half contemptuously*). You're Irish. Maybe you do, and maybe you don't. . . . Do you realize what that portrait means, Jane Corrigan? That portrait of the greatest man and gentleman and general that ever lived? And more than that, what — that — cup — and saucer mean?

JANE. Yes, sir — I know it all very well.

GOWER. Jane, General George Washington, the Father of our Country, drank tea out of that cup; yes, and by cracky, out of the saucer, too! In those days, it wasn't a disgrace to pour your tea into your saucer — I do it myself whenever I want to. . . . Well, as I was saying, when General Washington was passing through Germantown, Pennsylvania, in the summer of —

JANE (*quickly and roguishly*). Of seventeen eighty-nine!

GOWER (*snapping*). *Yes, of seventeen eighty-nine!* . . . General Washington stopped at the farmhouse of my great-great-grandfather, Ebenezer Gower. And my great-great-grandmother, Eunice Gower, gave him tea, out of that very cup and saucer — do you understand? Out of that very cup and saucer!

JANE. Yes, sir.

GOWER. And by cracky, my great-great-grandmother didn't wash that cup and saucer for a month! And then one of her slaves did it by mistake, and mixed up the teaspoon with the other spoons. And my great-great-grandfather caned him for it. By God, it served the — served the — (*He has a slight fit of coughing.*)

JANE (*instantly*). The black rascal right!

GOWER (*angrily*). Good God, Jane, can't you let me . . . Well, maybe you don't want to hear the rest.

JANE. Oh, sure an' I do, Mr. Gower! You mustn't mind my foolin'. *I like* the story; an' I honor the cup an' saucer most as much as you do.

GOWER. Well, well, Janey, you're a good girl. . . . And so my great-great-grandmother put that one cup and saucer in a place of honor; and in a place of honor it's been kept through all these generations. All the rest of the set got broken — all but one other pair.

JANE (*calmly, as if reciting an antiphon*). An' they're out on the second shelf o' the dinin' room cupboard. . . . You know, it seems like *they'd* ought to be in here, too.

GOWER. Not in the same room with General Washington's, Jane! No, *sir!* They never *have* been. My grandmothers always kept 'em separate. No outsider could ever tell the difference. We Gowers can always tell. I can tell in a minute — but only when I've got my specs on.

JANE (*meditatively*). I dunno as *I* could. I always wash 'em separate. I never held the two of 'em together.

GOWER. My dear Wife could tell the difference. She revered those relics; my son Edward that's dead revered them. But my son Harry and his wife don't give a damn — that's what *their* patriotism amounts to!

JANE (*quickly*). Yes, they do care, Mr. Gower, — they care *too much*. At least *she* does.

GOWER. What the devil do you mean, Jane? . . . That Margaret's a cold-blooded, hard-shelled woman. I don't care if she *is* a church member and always howling about truth and honesty. I wouldn't trust her any farther'n I could swing a cat by the tail. She's a two-faced baggage; and I'm ashamed that my son should have picked out such a wife. Harry had *some* good qualities, but damned if she hasn't ruined every one of 'em!

JANE. Mr. Gower, are you — are you after bein' afraid of your daughter?

GOWER. My daughter-in-law! Don't you forget the *in-law* whenever you speak of *her!* . . . *No*, I'm not afraid of her! Who says I'm afraid?

JANE (*who is on edge*). Well, it always does be seemin' to me — as if you sort o' . . . well, *you* know —— !

GOWER. Jane, when Margaret Gower comes to my house, I'll respect her: when she stays at home in Boston, I'll thank her the damnedest! . . . That's all! (*He is sitting, Right Front, by this time. Jane, up stage, has a sudden blinding flash in her mind. She clutches at her diaphragm with both hands, and with difficulty restrains a gasp of fearful joy. Hurriedly, she slips out the door Right.*) Here, you Jane! where're you going?

JANE'S VOICE. In a minute — in a minute! (*A slight rattle of dishes is heard.*) I'll be right back! (*She reappears, carrying the duplicate cup and saucer. She tries to appear natural and nonchalant.*) Sure, an' I just wanted to see are they the same, after all? (*She carries them to the little table and sets them down.*)

GOWER (*even before she gets there*). Here — don't you touch General Washington's! *Of course* they're the same — except for that one teeny-tiny curlycue on the genu-ine cup and saucer that nobody knows about but me. And *you* let them alone! (*Then softening:*) Now, Janey, you wait till I find you my great-great-grandmother's letter to her son Jonas, describing the great occasion! (*He rises and goes back to the desk. Jane stands at the left of the little stand, in an agony of nervousness, but trying to be calm and natural.*) First, I've got to put away my money, safe and sound. (*He locks the box.*) You notice, Janey, I don't keep *all* I've got in my bank account — Harry and Margaret'd be getting it out of me in some way. And don't you ever let on that you know I've got it! (*He gets down on his knees at the left end of the lowest drawer — that is, nearest to Jane. He can still see her; her time has not yet come. He places the box in the drawer then begins to ransack for the letter. She watches him like a hawk.*) Now, where the devil . . . ? Where's that letter? (*He suddenly turns his back to her, to reach up to the other end of the drawer. Instantly, with great caution, she takes down the true Cup and Saucer, sets them on the table, and puts the duplicates in their place. Frightened at her own act, she unobtrusively crosses herself, and regains her position, just as he speaks again. Her face is twitching in silent tears.*) A-ha! Here it is! Here's

the precious document! (*Laboriously, after closing the drawer, he rises from his knees, holding an old yellow letter. He looks at Jane.*) Why — why Janey, you've been crying! Damn it, what's wrong?

JANE (*straightening her face*). Nothin' — nothin', Mr. Gower.

GOWER (*irritably*). Jane, don't you dare to lie to me, about yourself or — or anything else! The Father of his Country never told a lie, and *I* won't *stand* a lie!

JANE. Sure, God winks at *some* lies, Mr. Gower — little white ones that don't do nobody no harm, but only good — don't He?

GOWER (*snapping*). He does *not!* A lie's a lie, and your own religion ought to teach you that. I'm a truthful man myself, and I wouldn't even *act* a lie, with this Great Example before me. And Jane Corrigan, if ever I catch you telling one, or even acting one — I don't care what it's about — damned if I don't send you out of the house, bag and baggage, so quick you won't know yourself!

JANE (*gulping*). Yes, sir.

GOWER. Jane, I fired you *once* for telling a lie. Five years ago. Do you remember *that?* You told the new water rent man there were only four faucets in my house (*speaking rather boastfully*), when there were really six. You lied, Jane — *you lied.*

JANE. I didn't, Mr. Gower — I didn't. I just showed 'im the four of 'em. Besides, I done it to save *your water rent* — you know *that.*

GOWER. I don't give a damn *what* you did it for. And if you didn't *tell* the lie, you *acted* it. And you remember I gave you your walking papers before you could say "Jack Robinson." And I'll do it again — by God.

JANE (*subdued but stubborn*). I was back again in three days.

GOWER (*snapping*). Yes, — because I was sorry for you. I-I-I-*I* didn't need you! . . . But you'll never be taken back again. This is a house of truth — you understand! You'll tell no lies or play no tricks for *any one!* Not even *me!*

JANE (*convinced at last, and depressed*). Oh, Mr. Gower, sure an' I believe you. I *won't* lie. I won't even *act* a lie. An' . . . there *is* somethin' I was after keepin' from you. I had a letter, this mornin' — from Mrs. Harry, it was; an' she'll be here any minute, now. She was to come out from Boston this mornin'.

GOWER (*starting to unfold the old letter, which he has held all this time*). So *that's* it! And what's that hellcat up to now?

JANE (*filling up with silent tears*). Oh, Mr. Gower dear, it's that hard to tell you what she's tryin' to do to you! My heart was 'most broke till I —

GOWER (*breaking in*). Well damn it — out with it! Don't stand around sniveling! Tell me — and no lies about it!

JANE. Well, I . . . it's this way. . . . (*Then suddenly she puts her apron to her face and runs to the window left, where she sobs and chokes.*) . . . I — I can't say it!

GOWER. Well, by God, you *will* say it!

(*Jane, hearing the noise of a motor stopping, raises her head and gives a great start. She chokes back the tears and speaks quickly, turning.*)

JANE. Saints alive! There she is now, gettin' out o' a machine, with a man!

(*She seizes the true Cup and Saucer from the table and runs hurriedly out right.*)

GOWER (*shouting*). *What* man? . . . Jane! (*While he stands, bewildered, he abstractedly refolds the letter and puts it in a coat pocket. The doorbell rings. Jane hurries in again and starts across to door left.*

JANE. Oh, my God!

GOWER (*explosively*). Look here, you! Don't you use such language! I'll be damned if I let any one swear in front of me!

(*But Jane has gone. The old man subsides and stands in a daze. Presently the front door is heard to open and close, and Jane re-enters, left, preceded by Margaret Gower and Clyde Ransom. Jane crosses to door right; but, unwilling to miss anything, she goes out, comes back and finally takes up her stand there.*)

MARGARET (*going up to Gower and kissing him effusively*). Why, Father dear! Here you are, looking hale and hearty as ever! . . . I *wish* you wouldn't keep the front door locked: I don't like to have to ring the bell in this house! . . . Father, I want to present Mr. Clyde Ransom, from Boston. Mr. Ransom's a great authority on Americana — that's American relics and

antiques, you know. (*This very sweetly and patronizingly.*) He's the curator of the Americana Museum!

(*Gower, standing, bows stiffly. Ransom bows with much grace and offers his hand, which Gower finally takes, bewildered.*)

RANSOM. I'm proud to meet you, Mr. Gower. I understand you're one of the patriarchs of the town.

GOWER (*suspicious but boastful*). I'm an old settler — that's what *I* am! Seventy-two years old. My father, Lemuel Gower, came to Massachusetts from Pennsylvania when I was a boy of twelve; and he was descended from —

MARGARET. Yes, yes, Father dear — I've told Mr. Ransom all about that. But . . . oh, won't you lay off your overcoat, Mr. Ransom? And sit down?

(*Margaret and Ransom lay their coats on the sofa in upper left corner. The three sit down — Gower in the easy chair, right. Jane trots in and out once or twice, but is never far away; she arranges small things at the back occasionally, but her main business is keeping on the scene of action.*)

. . . You see, Father, Mr. Ransom hasn't very much time, this morning, and I haven't either. We have to get back to Boston before eleven o'clock. And so — we'd better get to the business right away.

GOWER (*grimly*). What business?

MARGARET. Why . . . hasn't Jane told you about it? I wrote to her to tell you, and — sort of prepare you, don't you know? Didn't you get my letter, Jane?

JANE (*stiffly*). Yes, mum, I did. . . . But I didn't get the chancet. Besides, you can do your own tellin'.

MARGARET. Really, Jane, that was very inconsiderate of you!

GOWER. Well, Mrs. High-and-mighty, what have you got to spring on me?

MARGARET. A . . . Father dear . . . a . . . well, it's just this. I've come for the cup and saucer.

GOWER (*leaning forward*). *What* cup and saucer?

MARGARET. The ones you gave Harry and me a year ago last month.

GOWER. I *never* gave you and Harry a cup and saucer, a year ago last month, or any other time! What do you mean? . . . (*Then, springing up and with horror in his voice:*) My God — you don't mean the General Washington?

MARGARET (*still sitting and looking up at him*). Yes, Father — the Washington.

GOWER. It's a lie! I never did — and you know damn well I didn't! What do you want with my precious relic?

MARGARET (*rising*). Father, do you remember when you had pneumonia, that January, and you were so dreadfully ill, and your doctor bills were so heavy, and you were behind in your taxes, and . . . Oh, Mr. Ransom, I'm so sorry to have to speak of these things before *you!*

RANSOM (*suavely*). Oh, please pretend that I'm not present. I'd like to look at some of these old pictures,

if you don't mind. (*He goes to pictures upper left, keeping his back turned. Jane is still listening intently.*)

MARGARET. And Harry helped you out, Father, and paid your taxes, too, though he couldn't very well afford it at the time. Everything amounted to nearly a hundred and five dollars. And you were so grateful that you wrote — a — that is, you signed — a paper giving Harry and me the Washington cup and saucer whenever we should ask for them. . . . *Don't you remember?*

GOWER. No, by God, I *don't* remember! . . . I — I . . . It seems to me I did sign some paper that Harry fixed up, when I was too sick to know what I was doing; but — I don't know what it was. (*He seems very much bewilder*ed.) . . . Jane, is this true?

JANE. Sure, I don't know, Mr. Gower. They'd never 'a' did it if *I'd* 'a' knowed what was goin' on. I never heered tell of it till this mornin'.

MARGARET (*indignantly*). Of course it's true! And here (*producing a paper and holding it before him with both hands*) is the paper itself, and your signature. And the signature of Jim Dawson, your hired man, as witness; and that of Frank Loomis, the notary public. You swore to your promise. Read it, and maybe you'll remember *then*. And here's a note that Harry's penciled at the bottom, telling you to let me have the cup and saucer.

(*Gower tremblingly puts on his spectacles and reads.*)

GOWER. . . . My God, it's true! . . . And my own son and his wife would play me a dirty trick like that!

When *you knew* that I set more store by that cup and saucer than — than anything else I've got in the world!

MARGARET (*putting the paper into her bag*). Why, Father! You mustn't make me out dishonest — and before Mr. Ransom! You did it of your own accord, poor dear. We've just let it go indefinitely, but — well, now we're ready for the gift, Father.

GOWER. I tell you, I don't owe you that money. I paid it back to Harry, last May — every damned cent of it.

MARGARET (*starting a little*). Oh, *no*, you didn't!

GOWER. I did, I tell you! In gold and greenbacks.

MARGARET (*craftily, and a little uncertain*). Have you a receipt?

GOWER. Why — why — no! Who in thunder would think of asking for a receipt from his own son?

MARGARET (*reassured*). So, you see, you're mistaken. And we have the law on our side. (*Then, very sweetly, as she sits down:*) Besides, Father, you'll change your tune when you hear why I really want the cup and saucer — why Mr. Ransom and I want them.

JANE (*impulsively and scornfully*). Is he a second-hand man, I dunno?

MARGARET. Jane! How *dare* you speak so? . . . Father, this gentleman is *not* a — he's not even a dealer in antiques. He's come out from the Americana Society to pass upon the genuineness of the china — or porcelain, as *he* calls it. (*This last should subtly convey the inferiority complex.*) . . . And then — just think! Harry and I are going to present it to the Society —

yes, and we'll use *your* name, too, Father — , to go into their museum. And it's to be exhibited at their tea, this afternoon, and — and we'll all be written up in the papers. Think of the glory of it!

GOWER. Glory be damned! I don't want any public hogwash, and I do want my cup and saucer. . . . Mr. Ransom — or Handsome — or whatever your name is, how much are you giving her for this?

RANSOM (*quickly and unguardedly*). Seventy-five dollars.

GOWER (*triumphantly*). *A-ha! I thought as much.*

MARGARET (*at the same time, and turning a baleful look on Ransom*). *Mr. Ransom!*

RANSOM (*coming forward and covering his blunder with suavity*). I — oh! Well, it will *pass* as a gift, you know.

MARGARET. Besides — if the truth *must* come out — *I* said a hundred.

RANSOM (*politely but firmly*). Seventy-five is our limit.

GOWER (*eagerly*). And *I'll* give you a hundred and ten for it — I'll buy back my own property, by God!

MARGARET. And you always making a poor mouth about money!

GOWER. Well, I — I — I —— I *could get* the money — *now.*

MARGARET. I wouldn't sell you that cup and saucer for twice your hundred and ten dollars. It isn't the money I'm after, it's the *distinction.* . . . *Though I don't intend to let it go cheap!*

GOWER. Damn you for your trickery!

MARGARET. You shan't call it trickery! You know very well this was a fair and square bargain, and that I'm a righteous and honest woman. Mr. Ransom, I *am* ashamed!

RANSOM (*blandly*). Now, Mr. Gower, if you would only realize —

GOWER. Hold your tongue, sir! I don't want any advice from *you!* . . . My own son to lend himself to such a thing as this! On the twenty-second day of February, too! Good God, it'll kill me!

MARGARET. That's just sentimentalism, Father — these things don't really do you any good. (*She goes back to the shrine.*) Look here, Mr. Ransom. (*She takes down the duplicate pair and shows them to Ransom.*) This is real Royal Worcester, isn't it? . . . Oh, by the way, Jane, will you go upstairs right away, and see that the fires are in good condition? I want to take Mr. Ransom up and show him some of the mahogany and homespun. Don't worry, Father — I'm not going to sell *them!* . . . Please be quick, Jane.

(*Jane crosses to door left. She thinks that her face wears the expression of the Sphinx; but the Sphinx could not show such a mingling of anger, contempt and holy joy. At the door, she cannot resist one backward, withering look at Margaret. Then she goes out.*)

. . . Father, I can't stand that woman! She acts as if she owned you.

GOWER. Don't you dare say one word against *her!* How'd I ever live without Jane! She's the only one

that's got a scrap of feeling for me. (*He is standing near his chair right. Margaret turns back to Ransom and stands watching his examination. The old man turns his head toward them and lifts a fist in the air.*) By God, woman —

(*But she is still intent on the porcelain. Gower stops with his arm aloft, frozen by an egregious idea. His jaw drops; he turns to the front, his eyes nearly popping from his head. He grasps the back of the chair with both hands for support; first awe, then joy, are written on his face. This is a momentary suspension of the spirited tempo. His resolution formed, he hurries around and drops into his chair with a cavernous groan, his own idea of dejected acquiescence. Then another groan, just as Margaret starts to speak.*)

Margaret (*watching Ransom's face*). Good china — isn't it?

Ransom (*with a slight superior stress*). Porcelain. . . . Yes, it's Royal Worcester, in perfect condition. I should judge it's of — about —— seventeen hundred and fifty-five. And I believe there's a letter that goes with it?

Margaret. Oh, yes, — of course. (*She comes down.*) *Father dear* —

(*Gower groans and rubs his head.*)

Father dear, where is that letter? It ought to be part of the exhibit, you know.

Gower (*guardedly, and pressing his arm over his pocket*). Why — I haven't got it any more. It got burnt up, by accident, about six months ago.

MARGARET. Oh, *Father!* Isn't that a shame? . . . *Are you sure?*

GOWER. Why damn it — do you think I'd lie about it? *I* don't *tell* lies!

MARGARET (*sighing*). Well then, Mr. Ransom, I'm afraid you'll just have to take my word for it.

RANSOM. In which case, not a *cent* more than seventy-five dollars.

MARGARET (*in surprised expostulation*). But I've been *offered a hundred and ten for it!*

GOWER (*groaning dramatically*). I'm a poor, helpless old man! But I can't deny my own signature, and I can't fight against my own flesh and blood!

MARGARET (*patting his shoulder*). That's the way to talk, Father dear; and you've got to get it out of your head that we've tricked you. I'm a Christian woman and a church member; and everybody knows I'd never cheat or deceive any one; and I'd *never* tell a *lie!* . . . You come with me, Mr. Ransom (*They start left*). And if the Society's so crazy to get this cup and saucer, it can certainly afford at least a hundred dollars!

RANSOM (*as they pass through door left*). Mrs. Gower, you are very unreasonable. I've already told you —

(*And then they pass out of hearing. The old man groans again as they leave, and keeps it up till they are safely gone. Then he comes to sudden life, rises, and hurries out right. The noise of dishes is heard. He comes back almost immediately with the true Cup and Saucer, and goes to the table where the others sit. With trembling hands he makes the exchange, never thinking of course, to look for the "little curly-cues."*)

GOWER (*savagely*). That'll serve 'em right, damn their eyes! (*Then he sings, softly, stamping his feet:*) "Yankee Doodle came to town, a-riding on a pony!" (*Then he salutes the portrait.*) Well, General, we've got the enemy beaten, you and I! Skinned clean, by cracky! (*Then he carries the duplicates out right, muttering as he goes. He is heard to put them away, and soon he comes back, crosses to left, and drops into the chair there. He heaves a happy sigh and rubs his hands meditatively. Margaret comes in from left, carrying a square pasteboard box.*)

MARGARET. I found this upstairs. I'm going out in the dining-room to hunt some tissue paper — there used to be some in one of the drawers. (*She leaves the box on the little table.*)

GOWER (*with his eyes closed*). Mm'hm.

MARGARET. That man's a mean bargain driver. I couldn't get him to go a cent over seventy-five dollars. But I'm not going to back out; and I'm going to that tea, this afternoon, and see that we get just recognition, or my name's not Margaret Gower! But oh, I'd like to fix *him!*

(*Gower only groans. She passes out right, where she is heard opening and shutting a drawer and then moving dishes. The old man opens his eyes and smiles, and then turns in his chair, facing left, and sitting in an attitude of dejection. Margaret comes partly into the room, quickly, with the duplicate cup and saucer in her hands.*)

MARGARET (*in genuine surprise*). Why Father — I'd completely forgotten. . . .

(*She looks over at the pieces on the table, then at those in her hands — almost as she is speaking. Suddenly, with widening eyes and a repressed gasp, she realizes the hideous possibilities and the chance for revenge. She checks herself, covers the porcelain with one hand, and turns away.*)

GOWER (*dully, and without turning around*). What's that?

MARGARET (*tangled*). Oh — I mean —

GOWER. Well, *what* d' ye mean?

MARGARET. Why . . . oh, nothing. . . . I found some old tissue paper, Father. (*She bolts out quickly and leaves the duplicates around the door in the dining-room, and reappears with a bunch of tissue paper in her hands. Her eyes are bright and shining. Then, feeling her way, she speaks ingratiatingly.*) . . . Father dear — why don't you go upstairs and tell Mr. Ransom all about your old furniture and — a — *things*, you know — and all their history? Jane's with him, but what does *she* know? And you do tell things *so interestingly*, Father! I really think you ought to go.

GOWER (*still slumped down in his chair*). I'll be damned if I do!

MARGARET. Well . . . Father! He — he was pulling all the drawers in your room open, when I came down, to see how they worked!

GOWER (*springing up*). The devil he was! Well, *I'll* show *him!*

(*He stamps out left in a fury and a hurry. Margaret smiles, turns back into the dining-room and brings in*

the duplicate porcelain. She hurries to the table and makes a change.)

MARGARET (*almost breathlessly*). Now, you pack of skinflints! You sha'n't even have your seventy-five dollars' worth!

(*Back she goes with the true Cup and Saucer, and reappears just as Gower and Ransom come in left, followed by Jane. Jane goes across to the dining-room, but again hovers at the door most of the time.*)

RANSOM (*earnestly*). Of course I never *thought* of prying into your things, Mr. Gower! I didn't open a single drawer, as I've already told you. Surely there must be some mistake.

GOWER (*indifferently*). All right, sir, all right. No offense meant. (*Resignedly:*) There's been a lie *somewhere.* (*He sits down in his chair right, in assumed dejection.*)

RANSOM. Your things are wonderful, Mr. Gower; and I hope that some day you'll decide to let us have some of them. (*Gower only grunts, and Ransom turns back to the table.*) . . . Oh — I see you have a good box, Mrs. Gower — and paper; thank you. . . . No, I'll do them up myself. (*He deftly and quickly packs the pieces, while Margaret watches him with a sardonic smile.*) Mr. Gower, this is a valuable acquisition to our little museum; and I promise you that your story, as your daughter has told it to me, shall be placed on our records and fully exploited in the press. If you prefer to give it to me in your own words —

GOWER. I don't.

MARGARET (*sarcastically*). I've had to listen to the story — and the letter — often enough to get it all straight, I think!

RANSOM. Then I think we'll be going, Mrs. Gower.

MARGARET (*cuttingly*). You've forgotten something. And I want it before I leave this house.

RANSOM. Oh — yes — of course. (*He produces his pocketbook and counts out the money into her hand.*) Twenty — forty — sixty — seventy — seventy-five. Is that all right?

MARGARET (*putting the bills into her own purse*). It isn't — *right;* but . . . yes, *I think we're square* — you and I.

RANSOM (*putting on his overcoat*). Now I'm going on out to start my engine. Come as soon as you can, please. . . . Good morning, Mr. Gower. It's been the greatest pleasure to meet you. And thank you. (*He offers his hand to Gower, who takes it limply, without rising.*)

GOWER. Good-bye.

(*Ransom goes out left, with the box. Margaret puts on her coat. Jane, moving a step farther into the room, watches the other two alertly. All three seem awkward. At last:*)

MARGARET (*uneasily and embarrassed*). Well . . . ?

GOWER. What do you mean? . . . Seems to me there's nothing left to say.

JANE. Only . . .

MARGARET (*at a nervous tension*). Only — *what?*

JANE. Only . . . well, must I be takin' down that little cabinet, Mr. Gower? If I don't, *somethin'* ought to go in there, I s'pose.

MARGARET. Why — if — if there *is* anything else you'd like to have there . . . of course I don't know what, but . . . (*Her voice trails off.*)
(*Jane starts to speak, but stops with a gulp.*)

GOWER (*looking up suddenly with pretended interest*). Well, now — *I'll* tell you what! There's another cup and saucer, just like the General's — out o' the same set, Jane and I have always kept 'em hid. It seems to me, now, they *may* be out in the dining-room cupboard, behind that big, blue pitcher. . . . How about — how about having *them* in here — just to look at, you know, and — remember — and sort o' pretend? . . . *Damn it, why doesn't somebody answer me?*

JANE (*eagerly, now that the ice is broken*). Yes, yes, Mr. Gower — you're right! Let me get 'em! (*She darts out right and returns with the true Cup and Saucer, which she tremblingly and reverently places in the cabinet.*) . . . A-a-a-a-ah! Glory be to God!
(*Margaret bites her lip. She is hoist with her own petard.*)

MARGARET (*stiffly*). Yes — I'm sure that's very nice, Father.

GOWER. They look kind o' good — just like the real ones. Don't they, Jane? (*Then, turning to Margaret:*) And much good may you get out of your dirty bargain, madam!

MARGARET. Oh! Don't talk that way! . . . I have to go now. . . . A . . . Father, I — I hope you'll find some enjoyment in — *those*, you know. Of course *they* were probably on the tea table too, when — when your great-great-grandmother . . . when she . . . oh, well, good-bye!

(*Covered with confusion, she bolts out left. Jane stands watching her grimly. The front door opens and closes. The old man stands before the cabinet, his head bowed. When Margaret is quite gone, he lifts his head and squares his shoulders. Jane too looks at the cabinet, her guilty conscience struggling with her joy. She would like to make the old man happy with the truth, but she is afraid. At last, in a gentle voice:*)

JANE. Mr. Gower — *dear* — don't be after takin' it too hard!

GOWER (*moving slowly to his chair right, and dropping into it*). Jane, that woman's a she-devil. She's a cheat and a liar. . . . I s'pose I've got to take my medicine, though; honest men are usually the ones to suffer!

JANE (*standing left and fumbling nervously with her apron*). Mr. Gower . . . now . . . I'm wonderin' . . . wouldn't it 'a' made you happy if she was to 'a' got the wrong ones — after all? . . . If it could 'a' been fixed? (*She turns away from him in her embarrassment. He smiles a little, his eyes narrow, he nods his head slightly, and he grips the arms of his chair, starting forward. He too is on the verge of a confession.*) . . . Of course I was only thinkin' — it's a thing that God 'd 'a' winked at . . .

(*But he is afraid — afraid of belying his own standards. Could he again hold anything over Jane? . . .*

She turns back just in time to see his brows knit and his body stiffen.)

GOWER. Good God, Jane — NO! D-d-d-do you suppose I'd stoop — do you suppose I'd blacken my character with such a deception? I never want to hear such a damned, low-down insinuation again! After all I've said about lies — and from a Christian woman, too! . . . Why, what would General Washington up there have said?

JANE (*giving up the fight with a forlorn smile*). Oh, well! I didn't really mean it, an' o' course it ain't happened. I s'pose we'll just have to take it all out in pretendin', the rest o' our lives!

(*The old man's face assumes a sweet and crafty smile. He gets up and goes over to Jane and pats her shoulder.*)

GOWER. That's right, Janey — that sounds better. Spoken like an honest woman! . . . We'll pretend — and we'll believe it. (*He sweeps his left arm first toward the Shrine and then to high Heaven.*) And the first fellow that dares to say these aren't the General's own cup and saucer, by God — no, sir, by George — by *George Washington himself* — I'll throw him out of this house!

WHILE THE CURTAIN DESCENDS,
GOD SLOWLY WINKS.

NOTE: *Application for permission to produce this copyrighted play should be made in advance to Norman Lee Swartout, Summit, New Jersey.*

A WOMAN OF CHARACTER

BY

ESTELLE AUBREY BROWN

CHARACTERS

Mrs. Adams, *a matron.*
Old Lady, *mother of Mrs. Adams.*
Mrs. Perkins, *a matron.*
Mrs. Albright, *a matron.*
Mrs. Lee, *a matron.*
The Bride.
Mrs. Barrington-Cross, *a divorcee.*
Mrs. Cline, *a matron.*
Mrs. Lange, *a woman of character.*

Time: *The afternoon of a sunny summer day.*

Place: *Living-room of a middle-class American home. Through the immaculately-curtained windows in rear of room, the trees that shade the wall can be seen, as well as the heads and shoulders of persons coming up this walk to the house. Door at right. Long panel mirror between windows in rear.*

A WOMAN OF CHARACTER

Mrs. Adams is rearranging the furniture. She clears the "library" table of books and draws it to center of room. On it she puts several pads of paper, and pencils. She is placing chairs about the table when an old lady enters. Old lady is quick of movement, determined in manner. She bears little resemblance to her daughter, who is matronly in figure, modishly gowned, but looks every day of her thirty-five years.

OLD LADY. I've invited myself to your literary meetin', Nan. I thought I'd like to hear the goin's on.

MRS. ADAMS. But you've always said you didn't care for our literary programs, Mother.

OLD LADY. No more do I. Vaporin's, that's what I call 'em. Vaporin's. (*She seats herself in an arm-chair at the left, and from a gay little sewing apron takes a half-knitted sweater and yarn.*) There won't be no literary program this afternoon — not when a passel of women have got a new scandal to talk over.

MRS. ADAMS. You are mistaken, Mother. Mrs. Cline is to read a paper on Current Tendencies in Realism.

OLD LADY (*with scorn*). Vaporin's. Current tendencies in husbands, that's what you women are interested in.

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MRS. ADAMS (*eagerly*). Do you think she will come, Mother?

OLD LADY. Of course she will come. She ain't afraid of what a passel of women say about her. Mary Lange is a woman of character.

MRS. ADAMS. That's the trouble. Mary has so much character that I can't imagine how she is going to take Tom's disgraceful conduct. It wouldn't surprise me if she even wears that hat.

OLD LADY. Why shouldn't she wear it, I'd like to know! I'll warrant it's becomin'.

MRS. ADAMS. Mother!

OLD LADY. A hat is a hat, no matter what your husband is.

(*A woman passes on walk outside and bell is heard. Almost immediately maid shows in Mrs. Perkins. She, too, is thirty-five, handsome and vivacious, with beautiful hands with which she emphasizes all her remarks. Well-dressed, with string of beads and earrings. Speaks in clear, high voice. She is very blond.*)

MRS. PERKINS (*too excited for greetings*). Do you think she will come? (*Hurries to pull curtains at windows and looks out.*) Oh, I am so excited. If she comes we can't talk about her, but I am simply perishing to see that hat.

MRS. ADAMS (*laughing frankly*). So am I.

MRS. PERKINS. My maid says that the girl in Madame Celine's told her that Tom had to pay thirty dollars for it. I do hope she has the grace to leave town.

MRS. ADAMS (*indignantly*). Leave town! Why should she?

MRS. PERKINS. Well, I'll trust my George as far as most men, but I hope I'm not so stupid as to believe Tom Lange is the only susceptible husband in this town, Nan Adams.

MRS. ADAMS (*in relief*). Oh, you mean Madame Celine.

MRS. PERKINS. Of course I mean Madame Celine. Madame! I'd Madame her if I were Mary Lange. I'd have smashed every chapeau in her shop. But Mary just smiled that queer smile of hers and made Tom buy the most expensive hat Madame had. Fancy! I say this isn't a safe town for husbands so long as that little parlez-vous milliner stays in it.

MRS. ADAMS. She isn't even good-looking. Daubs red paint on her face and combs her hair straight back to look as if it were shingled.

MRS. PERKINS (*indicating with expressive hands the despised coiffure*). Straight back, but with little curly-cues over her cheeks.

OLD LADY (*unexpectedly*). Them's spit curls.

MRS. ADAMS. Mother!

OLD LADY. Well, they be. I used to wear 'em myself, once. There ain't nothing immoral in spit curls, is there?

MRS. PERKINS. They sound bad enough to be anything. Talk about your fluffy blonds! I'd trust my husband with twenty blonds rather than one of these straight-haired, curly-cued dames.

MRS. ADAMS. If this had happened to any other woman I'd know what to expect. But I simply can not imagine Mary Lange looking ashamed, or rushing to the divorce court.

OLD LADY. Why should she act ashamed? Just because a man is your husband is no reason you've got to get red in the face every time he does something foolish.

MRS. PERKINS. Of course not. We wives can't spend all our time blushing. But if you call Tom Lange's conduct merely foolish — (*she moves a chair to the window, from which vantage point she announces arrivals.*) Here come Jane Albright and Susie Lee. I haven't seen Sue with a hat on since she had her hair waved. (*Bell rings. Two women enter. Both wear straight-line gowns, beads and earrings. Mrs. Albright is a plain, stout woman. Mrs. Lee, who is pretty and simpers, wears no hat and is much given to patting and admiring her waved hair. Both are about thirty.*)

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Do you think she will come?

MRS. LEE. Do you think she will come?

MRS. PERKINS. Have you heard anything more?

MRS. LEE. My maid says that girl in Madame Celine's told her that Tom paid forty dollars for that hat.

MRS. PERKINS. My maid said thirty — and it's *perfectly plain*, with just a dodad up the side.

MRS. ALBRIGHT. They say it's large and black and very Frenchy.

MRS. LEE. And they are wearing such small hats now.

MRS. PERKINS. Do you think Mary will divorce him?

MRS. ALBRIGHT. If it was any other woman, I'd say yes. But Mary Lange has always lived with her head in the clouds. She's different.

OLD LADY. Of course she's different. Mary Lange is a woman of character.

MRS. ADAMS (*impatiently*). Mother! I suppose even a woman of character may divorce her husband, mayn't she?

OLD LADY. Not for a chit with spit curls. 'Tain't worth the trouble.

MRS. PERKINS. Well, whether you keep your head in the clouds or down on earth with your husband's, we women are all alike when it comes to our men.

MRS. ADAMS. I am not sure. Mary is —

MRS. PERKINS (*at window*). Here comes "Jack Says."

MRS. LEE. Who? (*Rushing to window.*)

MRS. PERKINS (*giving pantomime of bridal procession down the room, hums refrain from Mendelssohn*). "Here comes the bride," Mame Wright. She begins every sentence with "Jack Says." To hear Mame talk you'd think she and Jack Wright invented matrimony.

MRS. LEE. She is absolutely mushy over Jack.

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Honeymoon mush. (*Contemptuously.*) We all know how long that lasts.

MRS. PERKINS (*in loud whisper, as bell rings*). She's got on another new dress from her trousseau.

(*Maid shows in an extremely pretty girl of nineteen. She wears a lovely, clinging gown and drooping hat, with the usual beads and earrings. Her appeal is distinctly feminine.*)

THE BRIDE (*speaks in high, sweet voice*). Jack says I'm the most punctual girl he ever knew, so I do hope I am not late. (*She shakes hands with her hostess and the old lady, and smiles at the others.*) Jack loves for me not to keep him waiting.

MRS. ADAMS (*sweetly malicious*). How is Jack, Mame dear?

THE BRIDE. Oh, Jack is well, thank you, Mrs. Adams. It doesn't seem *natural* for a man to be so well and so *good* as Jack is. I wake up in the middle of the night thinking Jack is going to *die* — he is so good. I wish sometimes Jack would do something he oughtn't to — of course nothing bad — just some little, teeny-weeny thing —

OLD LADY. Don't worry, dearie. He will.

MRS. PERKINS. What does Jack think of the way Tom Lange's been acting?

THE BRIDE. Jack says Mr. Lange should be completely ostracized. Jack doesn't believe in the double standard, at all.

MRS. ALBRIGHT (*with innuendo*). How marriage changes some men.

THE BRIDE (*brightly*). That's what Jack says. Jack says he isn't the same man he used to be. Jack says this Madame Celine hasn't been any better than she ought to be for a long time.

MRS. ALBRIGHT. How does Jack know — he's so good?

THE BRIDE. Oh, Jack hears things at his Club. Of course it's a very good Club — exclusive, and all that. Still, Jack does hear awfully queer things there. I think sometimes that Club is not a good place for Jack.

MRS. ADAMS. That's Tom Lange's club, too, isn't it?

THE BRIDE. Yes. Why, Jack even heard there how much Mr. Lange had to pay for that hat. Fifty dollars. My going-away hat cost only fifteen. Of course poor Mrs. Lange is elderly, but I am dreadfully sorry for —

VOICES. Elderly!

MRS. PERKINS. Mary Lange isn't a day older than I am.

THE BRIDE (*sweetly*). Well, perhaps not exactly elderly. You *are* thirty-five, aren't you, Mrs. Perkins? Sixteen years does make a tremendous difference in ages, don't you think? Jack says I am just his little girl.

MRS. PERKINS (*at window*). Here comes Mrs. Barrington-Cross. She should be an authority on the divorce question — she's got one.

MRS. LEE. With alimony —

MRS. ALBRIGHT. One hundred dollars a month — and puts it all on her back.

(*Bell rings. Maid shows in a florid woman of forty. Over-dressed, wears summer furs, two chains of beads, earrings, carries large handbag. Unlike the others, she is still wearing short skirts, and displays the latest cut-*

out shoes and nude hosiery. She greets Mrs. Adams, nods at others, and seats herself in position of relief, with crossed legs, thereby displaying a jeweled garter below her knee. It should be said in justice to the lady that she has a shapely calf and ankle.)

MRS. B-CROSS. Is Mary Lange coming?

MRS. ADAMS. I wish we knew.

MRS. ALBRIGHT. I don't believe she will have the courage.

MRS. LEE. Not wearing that hat, anyway.

MRS. PERKINS. It's *per*fectly *plain*, with just a dodad up the side.

MRS. B-CROSS. My maid says that girl in Madame Celine's told her that Tom had to pay sixty dollars for —

MRS. PERKINS. My maid said thirty.

THE BRIDE. Jack said fifty! I'm sure it was fifty.

MRS. B-CROSS. Well, Mary Lange knows now what I endured. She's held her head pretty high over me — as if divorce was any disgrace. I tell you if it wasn't for our divorce laws we women would be slaves (*Looks approvingly at her shapely calf.*) Mere slaves.

MRS. LEE. Aren't men horrid? (*Reflectively.*) I do wish I were a man.

MRS. B-CROSS. Never! Think of always having the foot of your stocking larger than the leg!

THE BRIDE. I think it's dreadful — this talk about divorce and everything. A man and his wife should be

ONE. Why Jack says he doesn't have a thought, even, that he doesn't share with me.

MRS. B-CROSS (*with supreme contempt for bride*). Mary Lange has come down to earth at last. She will lose some of her airs before she gets out of Tom Lange as generous an alimony as I get.

MRS. ADAMS (*warmly*). Mary is a superior woman, but I never saw her give herself airs over it. She is always sweet and sane and fine.

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Has been, you mean. The woman doesn't live who can keep sweet and sane and fine when her husband takes to running after French milliners.

OLD LADY (*stoutly*). They do so! Mary Lange is a woman of character. You'll see. She ain't goin' to be thrown out of her stride for a painted chit with spit curls.

MRS. ADAMS. Mother!

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Oh, I grant Mary has character. She has a good mind, a good figure, and a good complexion. Give all these to a woman and she is bound to have character. She can't help herself.

MRS. B-CROSS. It isn't a woman's character that governs her conduct where her husband is concerned. It's her emotions.

THE BRIDE. Jack says a wife should always be governed by her heart.

MRS. B-CROSS (*carefully ignoring bride*). I have as much character as most women. But when Jim deserted me I was simply drowned in emotion. My character was

submerged, as it were — completely submerged in my emotions.

Mrs. Adams. Well, I can't imagine Mary Lange submerged in emotion. (*Anxious to change the subject.*) I wonder what is detaining Mrs. Cline. Our program will be late. (*Looks at her wrist watch.*) It's twenty minutes past the hour now.

(*No one present shows any particular interest in the delayed program. Old Lady mutters* — Vaporin's — *but subsides at a glance from her daughter.*)

Mrs. Perkins. It will take simply oodles of character to wear that sixty dollar hat there.

The Bride. Jack says fifty.

Mrs. Lee (*plaintively*). But I can't see what a woman's hat has to do with her character.

Mrs. Albright. Well, all I can say is, I don't know another woman who would have bought a hat under such circumstances.

Mrs. Perkins. And it's *per*fectly *plain*, with just a dodad up the side.

Mrs. Lee. I simply cannot understand Mary Lange.

Mrs. Perkins (*from window*). Here comes the program. It's got on a new dress.

Mrs. Lee. Who? (*Rushes to window.*) Oh, you mean Mrs. Cline. Is that a new dress? It's the same style they wore last year.

(*Bell rings. Maid ushers in Mrs. Cline, a plain woman of forty. She is very carefully dressed, wears long white*

gloves, hat with too much trimming, a huge corsage of roses, and the ubiquitous beads and earrings. She greets the circle in a constrained manner. It is apparent that the manuscript in her hand is a great responsibility.)

MRS. CLINE. I hope I haven't kept you waiting. I was unavoidably detained. (*Looks at wrist watch.*) Half an hour late! What a dull time you must have had waiting for me.

VOICES. Not at all. On the contrary.

THE BRIDE. Jack says —

MRS. CLINE (*absorbed in her manuscript*). Are all our members present, Mrs. Adams?

MRS. ADAMS. All except Mary Lange.

MRS. CLINE. Oh, Mary is coming. (*She takes up a position to the front, and unrolls her paper.*) I saw her in town yesterday. She said she might be a little late.

EXCITED VOICES. You saw her! What did she say? How did she act?

MRS. PERKINS. Did she have it on?

MRS. B-CROSS. Was she drenched in emotion?

BRIDE. Jack says —

MRS. CLINE (*for a moment forgetting her manuscript in her surprise*). What do you all mean?

VOICES. Haven't you heard?

MRS. CLINE (*great dignity*). I have heard nothing. I've been buried for days exhuming material for this paper.

(*All together*)

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Tom Lange has been —

MRS. LEE. That Madame Celine who keeps the French —

MRS. PERKINS. It's *per*fectly *plain* —

MRS. ADAMS. Mary went to the shop to look at hats —

MRS. B-CROSS. You can't tell me she didn't mistrust something —

BRIDE. Jack says Mrs. Lange hasn't had a new hat in three years —

MRS. ALBRIGHT. We all know it's a long way to the bottom of Tom Lange's pocket —

MRS. CLINE (*puts her hands over ears*). Stop! Stop! What are you trying to tell me? What has happened?

MRS. PERKINS. We are telling you. Mary went into that French shop to look at hats. Madame wasn't in, so that fresh girl clerk waited on her. Mary was looking at some cheap hats —

MRS. LEE. And all the time her husband and Madame Celine were in that part of the room that's curtained off for a workshop. You know how Tom Lange laughs — so loud and sudden —

MRS. B-CROSS. Mary recognized Tom's laugh, and she walked straight up to those curtains and yanked them apart and —

MRS. ALBRIGHT. There was Tom Lange holding Madame Celine on his lap.

MRS. CLINE (*genuinely shocked*). Mercy! What did Mary do?

MRS. PERKINS. My maid says that girl clerk told her that Tom and Madame were so surprised they just sat there, looking like sheared sheep —

THE BRIDE. Jack says he cannot understand Mrs. Lange, for she —

MRS. B-CROSS. She *smiled*, and said — "Why, how fortunate you happen to be here, Tom. I came in to look at hats, but since you are here I guess I will buy one — if Madame will kindly show me a becoming one."

MRS. PERKINS. For once anyway the red on Madame's face was genuine. Mary stood there preening before the glass and made Madame show her every hat in the shop, and Madame was so excited she forgot her English and kept saying, "Tres jolie, Madame, tres jolie, tres jolie," over and over — (*Pantomimes scene before mirror.*)

MRS. ALBRIGHT. And Tom couldn't say a word for himself.

MRS. LEE. Mary bought the most expensive hat in the shop and Tom had to pay forty dollars for it.

BRIDE. Jack says fifty —

MRS. B-CROSS. My maid said sixty.

MRS. PERKINS. And it's *per*fectly *plain*, with just a dodad up the side.

MRS. B-CROSS. And Mary left her old hat to be sent, and she walked out of that shop with Tom, wearing that hat, and *smiling*.

BRIDE. Jack says he doesn't understand Mrs. Lange, and I don't either.

MRS. ADAMS (*indignantly*). Would you have had her make a scene?

BRIDE. Scene! Why, if I found Jack with another woman on his lap, I'd *die*.

OLD LADY. Is a husband who holds another woman on his lap worth dying for, dearie?

BRIDE. Oh, I am so confused! But a wife shouldn't *ever* let her husband *ever* get to *wanting* another woman on his lap. That is why no woman should permit herself to get fat. If Mr. Lange had felt the way Jack does, he wouldn't have wanted to hold Madame Celine. Why, Jack says he can't go to sleep at night unless my head is on his shoulder.

MRS. B-CROSS (*contemptuously*). Unfortunately, most men find it highly monotonous to always have the same head on their shoulder.

BRIDE (*firmly*). I don't believe it. It's only you unattractive women who couldn't keep your husbands who talk like that. Jack and I will always be lovers, no matter how long we are married.

MRS. ADAMS (*kindly*). I'm sure you will be, child. You musn't let what we old women say trouble you.

BRIDE (*brightly*). Oh, it won't, Mrs. Adams. I'll always remember that none of you have a splendid husband like Jack.

MRS. PERKINS (*sotto voce*). Thank Heaven!

MRS. CLINE (*with revived interest in her manuscript*). It is very distressing, I'm sure. Shall we turn from realism in life to realism in literature? Will you please distribute the pads and pencils, Mrs. Adams? I want to insist that you take notes carefully for future discussion.

(*As Mrs. Adams passes paper and pencils, the women resign themselves to the inevitable. Mrs. Perkins takes her seat at the window. Mrs. Albright and Mrs. Lee write notes to each other, as Mrs. Cline begins to read.*

MRS. CLINE (*assumes position of great dignity*). (*Reads.*) Those who make the subject of realism in modern literature a matter of intense research stand appalled at the mass of material that has been written about this all-important phase of our literary output. They are at the same time confronted with the utter impossibility of extracting from this mass of material any real information.

OLD LADY (*muttering*). Vaporin's. (*But subsides when Mrs. Adams looks at her.*)

MRS. CLINE (*looking severely at Old Lady, repeats*). Any real information.

MRS. PERKINS (*greatly excited*). She's coming.

(*Old Lady brightens. All except her, Mrs. Adams and Mrs. Cline rush to window.*)

MRS. LEE, MRS. ALBRIGHT *and* MRS. PERKINS (*together*). She's got it on!

(*They remain crowded around the window until the figure of a woman passes. Mrs. Cline and program are forgotten.*)

MRS. PERKINS. Mary Lange must have just oodles of character to wear that hat here.

MRS. ALBRIGHT. Oodles of effrontery, you mean.

MRS. LEE (*plaintively*). I can't see what a woman's hat has to do with her character.

BRIDE. Jack says —

(*She stops as Mrs. Lange enters the room. Every face turns toward her as she advances. She is a handsome woman of thirty-five, slender, rather tall, and extremely composed in manner. The whiteness of her arms and neck are accentuated by the dark, sleeveless gown worn without ornament. But it is her hat that sets her apart as the best-dressed woman in the room. Simple as it is, only a supreme art could have fashioned it. Only a supreme composure, born of a calm spirit, could have worn it as Mary Lange wore it as she advanced quietly to greet Mrs. Adams.*)

MRS. LANGE (*greets Mrs. Adams affectionately and nods, smiling, to the others. She is apparently unaware of the tension her arrival has created*). I am sorry to be so late. Tom's leaving home so suddenly detained me.

MRS. PERKINS. Tom's leaving home!

MRS. LEE. Suddenly!

MRS. LANGE (*nonchalantly*). Oh, Tom had to go to Longwood for a day or two, on business. I stayed to pack his bag for him.

(*Mrs. Lange's reply, coupled with her composed manner, leaves everyone too perturbed to speak. Mrs. Cline*

seizes the opportunity to again take up her position to resume the reading of her paper.)

MRS. LANGE. Did I interrupt your reading, Mrs. Cline? Won't you please continue? (*She seats herself near the table, before which Mrs. Cline stands.*)

MRS. CLINE (*begins reading, but not an eye turns in her direction. Every eye is riveted on Mrs. Lange's hat*). Those who make the subject of realism in modern literature a matter of intense research stand appalled at the mass of material that has been written about this all-important phase of our literary output. They are at the same time confronted with the utter impossibility of extracting from this mass of material any real information.

(*During the reading, Mrs. Lange removes her hat and places it carelessly on the table. Every eye automatically follows it. The motion attracts Mrs. Cline's attention and she too, in spite of herself, looks at the hat, and is forced to repeat,* " any real information." *Mrs. Lange takes the hat, patting it with little feminine touches. Everyone gazes as if hypnotized. Mrs. Cline's attention again wanders, and with difficulty she completes her sentence* —)

MRS. CLINE. — any real information on the subject.

(*Her audience has been so absorbed in Mrs. Lange and her hat that when the telephone bell rings loudly they all start nervously. It is a welcome interruption. Mrs. Adams goes to the telephone. The Bride half rises from her seat with the air of a person accustomed to frequent calls.*)

MRS. ADAMS (*at telephone*). Yes. Yes. (*Turns to Bride.*) It's Jack, Mame. He wants to speak to you.

BRIDE (*joyously goes to take the message*). Hello, Sweetie. What? Of course I can. . . . I'll come right home. . . . What? . . . Oh, just a lot of silly talk about a hat and divorces. . . . No, I won't be missing a thing, darling . . . it's an awfully dull program . . . by-by, dovekins.

(*She hangs up the receiver, her face radiant and turns to the group of women of which Mrs. Lange is the only calm member.*)

It's Jack. He says he has been home alone for fifteen minutes. He wants me to come right home. (*She shakes hands with Mrs. Adams.*) Good-by, everybody. (*She turns at the door to say politely*—) So sorry to miss your wonderful paper, Mrs. Cline. (*Exit.*)

(*For the first time that afternoon the Bride's act finds general approval. Pads and pencils are put down quite unused and there is a general movement toward departure.*)

MRS. ADAMS. But our program!

OLD LADY (*sotto voce*). Program! Vaporin's.

MRS. ALBRIGHT. It is really very late.

MRS. LEE. I promised Donald I'd have 'scalloped oysters for dinner.

MRS. PERKINS. Such an interesting paper, Mrs. Cline. So sorry—

MRS. CLINE (*highly indignant*). I gave up two Mah Johng parties and an evening at bridge to write this

paper. I might better have gone to them. (*She bids Mrs. Adams a cold farewell and sweeps from the room.*)

Mrs. Perkins (*preparing to go*). Never mind her, Nan. She'll be on hand with it at our next meeting. Wild horses can't keep her from reading it.

Mrs. B-Cross (*to Mrs. Lange, who has remained seated*). Such a pleasant surprise to see you looking so well, Mary. I am sure I wish you every success.

Mrs. Lange. Success?

Mrs. B-Cross (*significantly*). Oh, no mere male jury could ever resist that hat!

(*At Mrs. B-Cross's remark all listen with bated breath for Mrs. Lange's reply. Smiling enigmatically, Mrs. Lange picks up her hat and goes leisurely to the mirror and carefully adjusts it. It is tremendously becoming.*)

Mrs. Lange (*over her shoulder*). Oh, Mrs. Barrington-Cross?

Mrs. B-Cross (*eagerly*). Yes?

Mrs. Lange. I think you are quite right. Men do notice women's clothes. (*Pause, still adjusting her hat.*) Just the other day Tom remarked that you were the only woman in town who still wore the old-fashioned short skirts. (*Having adjusted her hat to her satisfaction, Mrs. Lange turns to the angry Mrs. Barrington-Cross.*) Men so hate to have long skirts come back. I told Tom that very likely you were trying to be considerate.

(*Speechless with anger, Mrs. Barrington-Cross is swept with the others to the door as they bid Mrs. Adams*

good-bye. As they pass the open window outside, their voices drift back into the silent room.)

1ST VOICE. Her head still in the clouds —

2ND VOICE. Out of style —

3RD VOICE. *Per*fectly *plain*, with just a dodad up the side.

(*The room is very quiet. The Old Lady knits calmly. Mrs. Adams gathers up the unused pads and pencils and puts them in the drawer of the desk.*)

MRS. ADAMS. Thank goodness, they're gone!

MRS. LANGE. The dears have been talking about me, haven't they, Nan?

MRS. ADAMS. Outrageously.

MRS. LANGE (*plunging straight to the thought in both their minds*). Do they expect me to divorce Tom?

MRS. ADAMS. You have them all guessing, Mary.

MRS. LANGE. Even you, Nan?

MRS. ADAMS. I am as much at sea as any of them, Mary. But I know this, dear, whatever you do will make no difference in my feeling for you. (*She laughs ruefully.*) Even if you adopt the present fashion and go gunning for Tom — it would not change my friendship, Mary.

MRS. LANGE (*with much feeling*). You dear! (*She goes over and kisses her friend's cheek.*) After all, one friend who stands by in time of shipwreck is all anyone has a right to expect of life.

(*There is silence for a moment. Mrs. Lange moves about the room restlessly and again takes off her hat and puts it on the table.*)

Mrs. Lange. I am not going gunning for Tom, Nan. Neither shall I divorce him. (*Old Lady nods her heads approvingly.*)

Mrs. Adams. I couldn't imagine you in a divorce court, Mary.

Mrs. Lange. Oh, I confess that at first I could have taken that little Madame Celine and boiled her in oil! Cheerfully! That was because I was reared to a false conception of sex.

Mrs. Adams. You mean as to its emotional importance?

Mrs. Lange. Yes. American women are unique in this one thing, at least. They are taught the most erroneous ideas of love of any women in the world. It has made us a nation of divorcées.

Mrs. Adams. Be a feminine Daniel come to judgment, Mary. Tell me what the correct idea of love would be.

Mrs. Lange. Love? (*Going to the table, she takes her hat, which she regards thoughtfully for a moment.*) You want to know what love is like to me, Nan? Twentieth Century love? (*She laughs softly.*) It's like a glass of beer, Nan.

Mrs. Adams (*much shocked*). Mary!

Mrs. Lange. Oh, not Volsteadian beer. I intended no slander. I mean the good old kind that had an inch of foam. We are each given a glass, Nan. The foam is

young love — romance. It's bubbles and sparkle and joyousness. It's the most beautiful thing in the world — young love. It's the dew on the cobweb, it's the anemone of the springtime — it's the flowering of our illusions.

MRS. ADAMS. And as fleeting as the anemone, Mary?

MRS. LANGE. Of course. You can't live on foam and anemones, no matter how beautiful they are. Now, the average American girl is taught to believe the beer is all foam. She drinks and finds it isn't. Of course she is dreadfully cut up about it, and at the first taste of the dregs in her glass she rushes to the divorce court. It's so futile, Nan. The foam on some glasses is thicker than others, but they all have dregs.

OLD LADY (*softly*). They do so.

MRS. LANGE. I ask you frankly, Nan, how long does young, romantic love survive marriage?

MRS. ADAMS. Oh, I suppose you are right, Mary. About as long as your anemones last. But what about right and wrong?

MRS. LANGE. Right and wrong are where they always have been — with the individual. Wise women of our age, Nan, have put aside the thought of happiness as a condition. We achieve instead peace of mind. Now I can't believe it was intended that my peace of mind should be wrecked because of someone else's sin. But because Tom has joined man's eternal hunt for fresh anemones I am expected to be mortally wounded, to break up my home, to deprive Junior of a father —

MRS. ADAMS (*interrupting*). I've always thought of Tom as a good father, Mary.

MRS. LANGE. He is. Junior adores him — why am I expected to do all this? Should any person have such an influence over another? One's life becomes a weather-vane to show how someone else's wind is blowing. My life is more than that!

MRS. ADAMS. I knew you would be different, Mary.

MRS. LANGE (*whimsically*). I must be different, since I am not mortally wounded! The anemones of Spring are gone, Nan, but the sweet, tranquil flowers of Summer are blooming. I shall go forward into the Autumn of my life and no emotional sophistry shall mar my serenity.

MRS. ADAMS. I knew you would not be another Mrs. Barrington-Cross.

MRS. LANGE (*hesitatingly*). There is another side to all this, Nan. I don't believe I can quite put it into words. But since this happened, I have felt so — free!

MRS. ADAMS (*surprised*). What do you mean, Mary?

MRS. LANGE. Have you never felt that the faithfulness of a husband binds not only the wife's body to fealty, but her mind?

MRS. ADAMS. Oh, I know the marital creed — "To a faithful husband all is forgiven!"

MRS. LANGE. Exactly. A wife must love a faithful husband or her conscience hurts her. The neighbors know that he has a bald head, but she must see only that halo of anemones. To the world he is merely a fat man snoring over his evening paper, but to the wife he is a demi-god reposing to the strains of celestial music. Fetters of the mind, Nan.

(*Old Lady is seen to smile and nod approvingly.*)

MRS. ADAMS. Mary, you are hopeless.

MRS. LANGE. Fetters of the mind, Nan. Little tendrils that creep into your thoughts to bind them to an idealism humanly impossible to cherish. Fetters that make your inner life a thing of sham and pretense.

MRS. ADAMS. And Tom, Mary.

MRS. LANGE. Tom is no better or no worse than most men, Nan. (*She takes her hat from the table and again goes to the mirror to adjust it.*) Still, we've been married fifteen years and this is the first hat I've had that cost Tom more than five dollars.

MRS. ADAMS (*impulsively*). How much did that hat cost Tom, dear?

MRS. LANGE (*smiles in understanding*). How dear and human you are, Nan. What did this hat cost Tom? It cost him his throne in the kingdom of his home. It cost him all those little fetters of the body and of the mind with which he had bound me. And it set me free.

(*Old Lady nods in approval, as the Curtain falls.*)

JAZZ AND MINUET

BY

RUTH GIORLOFF

CHARACTERS

MRS. VAN HAYDEN, *a handsome woman of 38. Costume: An evening gown.*

ELEANOR PRUDENCE VAN HAYDEN, *her daughter, 19. Costume: a becoming negligee.*

PRUDENCE VAN HAYDEN, *her great-great-aunt. Costume: Colonial, with panniers, petticoat, beauty patches, a soft, white curled wig or her own hair in curls.*

Same Person

RICHARD TOWNSEND, *Eleanor's lover, 25.*

ROBERT TROWBRIDGE, *the great-great-aunt's lover. Costume: As both characters, Townsend and Trowbridge, wears a light colored Colonial costume. Sword, three-cornered hat, dark cape, etc., white wig.*

Same Person

NETTIE, *servant in modern maid's costume.*

LUCY, *servant of Colonial days. Ruffled cap, apron, bodice, white cotton stockings, neckerchief.*

Same Person

MILORD DEVEREAUX, 35. *Wears a black or dark-colored Colonial costume, dark wig, sword, cape, etc.*

TIME: *Eight* P. M. *Now and one hundred and fifty years ago.*

NOTE: There are *eight* (8) distinct characters in the play; but as three of them play two parts each, a cast of five only is essential.

JAZZ AND MINUET

THE *curtain rises on the living-room of the Van Hayden apartment. Set at an angle from front to back, right, is a large divan with cushions. At back end of this is a small table, holding a telephone, covered by a small screen or a fancy doll figure. Near table is a chair. In corresponding position, left, is a long library table, with bench of same length, running parallel. On table is a bowl or vase of flowers; a tall candlestick holding a large diameter candle; some books, and under a magazine, a small package, wrapped, and stamped, and addressed, which contains Prudence's leather-covered diary. At front end of table is a comfortable, cushioned armchair. All the furnishings are beautiful, and rather suggest the Colonial type of interior. There are exits right and left, and center back is a tall French window with drapes. During the dream this is used as exit and entrance. A Victrola, with a jazz record in place, can be set in upper left corner if desired.* MRS. VAN HAYDEN *is seated on the divan, reading. After a short pause,* TELEPHONE RINGS. *She looks at it with a quizzical expression, then returns to her reading,* NETTIE *comes on from right.*

NETTIE (*picking up telephone, and speaking with a delightful brogue*). Yes, sir, this is Mrs. Van Hayden's apartment. It is. Yes, this is Nettie. Aw, now! Shure

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it's not only the Irish have kissed the Blarney stone, the flattherin' things ye say about me voice, sir. (*She giggles.*) Yes, sir. She *is!* I *will!*

Mrs. Van Hayden. Who on earth is that, Nettie? It can't be Mr. Townsend — he's due here any minute now.

Nettie (*putting instrument back on table*). 'Tis him, an' no other, ma'am. He wants to speak to Miss Eleanor. (*Exits right to inform* Eleanor. Mrs. Van Hayden *sighs slightly, then resumes reading.*)

Eleanor (*offstage*). Oh, mother!

Mrs. Van Hayden. Yes, dear?

Eleanor (*offstage*). Please talk to Dick and see what he wants.

Mrs. Van Hayden (*with decision*). I know what he wants *without* speaking to him; he wants to talk to you, not to your poor, old mother.

Eleanor (*offstage*). Poor and old be jiggered. The man positively dotes upon you. You'll just *have* to answer him.

Mrs. Van Hayden. But he'll talk to you eventually. He always does. Come along, now.

Eleanor (*offstage*). Oh, darn it! I simply can't. I'm hurrying like mad so I'll be ready when he gets here.

Mrs. Van Hayden. I hate taking lover's messages.

Eleanor (*offstage*). Mother, he's not my lover.

Mrs. Van Hayden (*sotto voce and with resignation*). The persevering suitor, then. (*Picks up telephone.*)

Sorry to keep you waiting, Dick. I hope you heard me arguing with that child of mine. She's dressing. Doesn't want to keep you waiting more than the proverbial hour, I believe. It's a noble sentiment, isn't it? Can you give me the message? (*Pause.*) I see. Yes, of course. Just as I thought. Surely. I'll have her come this instant. (*Calls.*) Eleanor! Richard insists upon speaking to you.

Eleanor (*dashing on in a negligee*). Oh, mother, I *never* knew it to fail. He makes me perfectly *wild!*

Mrs. Van Hayden (*laughing quietly*). Naughty! Now, don't bite his head off.

Eleanor (*laughing at her mother, and picking up phone*). Hello! Yes, this is me. What? Me is *so* grammatical. Yes, it is. Oh, well, if it isn't, I don't care. What did you call me for? (*Pause.*) *What?* Oh, Dick! Oh, *why?* Why can't you? That's absolutely disgusting. It's a fine hour to call a business meeting. Why didn't you tell those people you had an important engagement? No, I won't stay home. No, I don't want to get there so late; all the fun'll be over. Now see here, Richard Townsend, you're not going to tell me what to do. We're not engaged — no, and we're not going to be either. I'll get another escort, thanks. You needn't bother to come later, no, no, NO! (*Slams telephone down on table. She is on the verge of angry tears, and slumps down in chair.*) Oh, he just makes me perfectly furious. When he does something like this, I — I *hate* him!

Mrs. Van Hayden (*still apparently absorbed in her book*). Of course, Richard isn't *President* of his com-

pany yet; so they probably didn't consult him when they called this meeting.

ELEANOR. There's your abominable sense of humor cropping out again. Each time this has happened you've said the same thing.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Well, when events repeat themselves, why not save time by just saying the same things about them?

ELEANOR (*angrily as she goes left*). Oh —

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*putting her book aside*). Eleanor, instead of acting like a spoiled child, you might at least be polite to Dick. As a matter of fact, I think he's to be congratulated upon having enough common sense to stick to his work and miss a few pleasures occasionally, especially —

ELEANOR (*going toward her mother*). Oh, it's simply maddening the way you always stand up for that man, mother. I do think you might be a little sorry for me.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. I do sympathize with you, dear — but I can't quite get your point of view, somehow. You and your young friends seem to spend the greater part of your time trying to find new ways of amusing yourselves — you're all so selfish, self-centered, impatient —

ELEANOR. Mother! I thought you said you *sympathized* with me. (*Goes right.*)

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Yes, I *do* —

ELEANOR. But you're calling me names! that's no way to talk about your elegant offspring.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Telling my elegant offspring occasionally what I think of her seems to be one of the few privileges I possess.

ELEANOR (*as she rather sprawls on bench in front of table, leaning her arms along edge of table*). Oh, mother, you're the limit; honestly you are.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*seriously, yet with a smile*). Am I really? Seriously, though, Eleanor, wouldn't you rather have your Mums tell you now? It doesn't hurt to stop once in a while and take a sort of "personal inventory." (*She sighs and watches Eleanor with a worried, though puzzled expression.*) I must confess I've been wondering about you — you're so impulsive, and you get so angry when you're denied any pleasure — you see only *your* side —

ELEANOR (*rather indignantly*). Oh, mother, do stop bawling me out! I'm miserable enough as it is. Anyhow, what I want is a dance, and not a sermon. I'll take my sermon tomorrow — it's Sunday; but I want my dance *tonight!* And think of my precious dress in there on the hanger, with not a soul to look at it. (*She thinks hard for a moment.*) Oh, I don't care — I'm going. I'm GOING. That settles it. (*Goes to telephone.*) Schuyler 7296.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*curiously.*) Whose number is that?

ELEANOR (*rather airily*). Oh, just the Apollo-ist man I know. (*Pause, while her mother watches her.*) Hello! Schuyler 7296? Mr. Blake's apartment, please.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Mr. Blake?

ELEANOR. Uhuh! Hello, Phil? Know who this is? No? (*Pause.*) Oh, my goodness, you've as many lady friends

as Solomon had wives. Don't go any further down the list, please. Phil, this is Eleanor Van Hayden. Yes. Are you doing anything fearfully important tonight? Want to take pity on a poor, perishing soul? Well, I *was* going to the Grove's Masquerade, and my — (*She looks meaningly at her mother.*) *devoted admirer* didn't show up. Will you? You're a lamb! Have you a costume? Oh, splendid! Yes, I'll be ready when you reach here. Good-bye (*Rises, intending to hurry off right.*) Yes, and I was *darn* lucky to get him.

Mrs. Van Hayden. Eleanor, have I ever met this young man? His name doesn't sound at all familiar.

Eleanor (*with an extremely innocent expression upon her face.*) Um, er — no, darling, no. I don't think you've ever met him. But he's absolutely the best-looking thing — sort of Byron-ish, you know — a marvellous dancer. Maybe he's a bit speedy; but he's all right when you know how to handle him. (*She is standing back of telephone table.*)

Mrs. Van Hayden (*rather alarmed*). "When you know how to handle him?" Why, my dear, he sounds rather like dynamite —

Eleanor (*leaning over back of divan and holding her mother close while she speaks rather patronizingly.*) Oh, Mums, you couldn't possibly understand — you see, you're still living in the dark ages somewhere — times have changed since Queen Victoria was a girl. (*Laughs. Exit right to change dress.*)

Mrs. Van Hayden (*sighing*). Eleanor, I'm afraid some day you'll be taught a lesson —

ELEANOR. Me, taught a lesson? Oh, no, mother darling. I'm not the one who'll be taught a lesson — it's little Dickie Townsend who will, not *your angel-chee'ild!*

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*ruminatingly*). I've never been able to discover why your father insisted upon your being christened "Eleanor Prudence." To my knowledge you've *never* shown the slightest evidence of that virtue.

ELEANOR (*offstage*). Alas, venerable parent, *Prudence* is a word not found in the "bright lexicon of youth" these days. Maybe it appealed to my great-great-aunt, but not to me. Why, it'd rob life of half its thrills. (*She comes on, in her Colonial costume, and goes to her mother for the final touches.*) Mother, isn't this the darlingest thing. I wish I could wear it every day. I don't know why; but it makes me feel sort of "old-time-ish" somehow.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*giving the gown a few final pats, and rising to look at it from left*). There! Now, turn around slowly, dear — let me see it.

ELEANOR (*making an old-fashioned curtsey*). Well, dost like the picture, love?

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Yes, I do. Strange how much you resemble that old miniature of your great-great-aunt Prudence. She, poor soul, was the one member of the family who — oh, dear! I meant to tell cook something and it all but slipped my mind. (*Turns intending to exit right.*)

ELEANOR (*consumed with curiosity and intercepting her*). Mother, what about my darling gee-gee-a? . . .

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Your what?

ELEANOR. My gee-gee-a? Great-great-aunt, mother dear. Why was she, poor soul, the *one* member of the family *who?*

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Oh, she was the one member of the family who died a spinster. And that reminds me, though I don't know why it should — Aunt Helen sent you a package today. I told Nettie to put it on the table. (*Goes* LEFT *to look at table.*)

ELEANOR (*regarding table from a distance*). My goodness, it must be fearfully small — 'tain't wisibul to the naked eye.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*moving things about on table to look for package*). I know it's here somewhere.

ELEANOR (*discovering the package beneath some magazines*). Aha! Diskivered at last. Well, I ought to have some sort of consolation prize — seeing I've been so disappointed and abused — (*Starts opening box.*)

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*with mock sympathy*). What a tragedy! So young — so beautiful — and yet, so unhappy! Ah, me! (*Laughs at Eleanor.*)

ELEANOR (*putting her arms about her mother and kissing her*). Spoofer! So *young* is right. But I question the wisdom of the other two epithets. (*Goes over to chair near small table and unwraps package.*) Maybe this is one of the famous Van Hayden jewels, mother. You know, I've always fancied that stomacher thing with the rubies and diamonds.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Yes, that would be appropriate for you, Eleanor. I believe it was worn only by the dowager members of the family — you have so much dignity and poise, dear.

ELEANOR (*chuckling*). Yes, haven't I, Mother? Just the same I've always been terrifically keen about it. I sort of let Aunt Helen know once — *en passant* — you understand. I tried the thing on, too, and honestly, I looked like a short circuit or something — all a whizzle of sparks and fire. (*Finally is rewarded by bringing to light a small, leather-bound book.*) Oh — ! (*She wails.*) It's a book, and not crown jools! Oh, *damn!*

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*thoroughly aroused*). Eleanor, I will *not* have you talk like a gutter-snipe!

ELEANOR (*contritely*). I'm sorry, Moth. But when you're expecting something else, and then all you have wished on you is a little, musty, moth-eaten book, why —

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Don't be so absurd. Helen doubtless had some very good reason for sending this book to you — *little* as you deserve it!

ELEANOR (*peevishly*). Well, it's something I have use for anything, BUT!

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*giving up in despair*). Then I shan't waste any more time on you. You're an ungrateful young person. Your language is horrible; your manners are worse, and I know it's my fault that you've turned out this way. I think I'll leave you and go meditate quietly upon my short-comings as a parent and guiding star. (*Starts off again right.*)

ELEANOR (*who has been glancing through book*). Oh, wait a minute, mother. It's a diary. It says on the cover: "Prudence Van Hayden, Her Booke." (*Turns over some pages.*) Must be a card or something with it. Yep, here's one. (*Brings out a little card and reads*

from it.) "Dear 20th Century Prudence?" Mother, she's put a question mark after the name "Prudence." Isn't that a dirty dig? (*Reads note hurriedly.*) They found this book in a chest in the attic when some repairs were being made — it's been there years — it had my name on it, so Aunt Helen sent it to me —

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. There, you see? Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself?

ELEANOR (*hanging her head in mock shame.*) Uhuh! Drefful' shamed, mother. (*She rises hurriedly and goes to her mother.*) But, just the same, with all my faults you love me still, don't you, mother darling?

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*kissing her*). Goose! Of course I do. But you're an awful problem. Still — I suppose there's *one* thing to rejoice over — you weren't twins! (*Exit right, laughing.*)

ELEANOR (*watching her mother go, and wondering what to do next*). Oh, dear! I hope Phil shows up soon (*Picks up diary.*) I believe I'll rattle the family skeleton while I'm waiting. A little soft music wouldn't be so bad. (*Goes to Victrola, upper left, and turns on the last part of the jazziest record she can find. Jazz-steps back to divan. Plumps herself down and prepares to read. Music stops automatically.*) Oh, Prudence, darling, I hope you're rich, rare and racy — full of pash and dash, and dirty deeds. (*Starts reading.*) "May, 1775. Crawford Manor. Oh, little book, how shall I begin? How put into words the fearsome crime I have witnessed but a short space back? Yet perhaps *my* folly will be the means of warning some other maid. My eyes are blind with tears and my cold fingers scarce can hold the quill, — and my heart — there is naught left — in its

place is a void. I, Prudence Van Hayden, have been the cause of a most foul murder. Young Robert Trowbridge, to whom long ago I pledged my love, died in my arms tonight, and his death is upon me as surely as though mine were the hand that held the weapon. Oh, God, what shall I do, — how live without him? It all came about through a — " (*The lamp on table at end of divan goes out. Stage is left pitch-blank.*) Oh, ye gods! Left in the dark with a murderess! Mother, what's the matter with the lamp? (*Slight pause.*) Where *is* everybody? (*Another short pause.*) Nettie! Nettie! Please bring a light.

(*There is silence. Then from left enters Lucy bearing a lighted taper and a letter on a silver tray. She stops at long table, lights candle there. Stage brightens a trifle. She crosses to divan. Eleanor's head is resting on her hand. The diary has fallen to the floor.*)

LUCY. Miss Prudence! Miss Prudence! (*Touches her gently.*)

PRUDENCE (*rousing sleepily*). What now, Lucy? What is it?

LUCY. A letter by Mr. Trowbridge's man, ma'am.

PRUDENCE. By his man? What time is it, Lucy?

LUCY. 'Tis but little past ten, Miss Prudence.

PRUDENCE (*stifling a yawn, rising, taking letter and crossing to bench to read letter by candle-light*). Mr. Trowbridge should have been here long since. I drowsed awaiting him. (*Reads aloud.*)

" Matters of grave import conspire to detain me till a later hour than I promised to come to you; but I beg

that you will, upon my arrival, permit me to escort you to the rout. Forgive me. Devotedly, Robert." (*Angrily tapping her foot.*)

Faith! I'll *not* forgive you, Master Trowbridge. I suppose I must sit and wait for you to come and fetch me — wait while the gayest hours at the rout fly by. An' you fail me, sir, I'll have another escort. (*Thinks a moment.*) Lucy — do you hasten over to Milord Devereaux —

LUCY (*aghast.*) Oh, ma'am, Milord Devereaux?

PRUDENCE. Did you not hear the name aright?

LUCY. Lud, ma'am, what would Madam say to such boldness?

PRUDENCE. Hold your tongue, girl. My mother is away tending Mistress Wylie, and the men are gone to the Inn to bowl. There'll be no harm in it. (*As Lucy hesitates.*) Away with you, girl. Lucy, you may have my purple silk petticoat, an' you do this errand with despatch.

LUCY (*overjoyed at the prospect and going out through French window back*). Oh, ma'am —

PRUDENCE. My purple silk petticoat — I never liked the color overmuch. (*Wanders about room, adjusting her ruffles, curls, picks up a hand mirror from table and admires herself by candlelight. She is rather excited.*) Report hath it that Milord Devereaux is a devil of a fellow — oh, Robert will be furious when he hears of it. But 'twill serve him right. I've heard whisperings of the Devereaux ways with women — there's not a soul from one end of the county to the other who hath not some tale of his wild pranks —

LUCY (*entering through back, breathless and agitated*). Oh, Miss Prudence —

PRUDENCE. What, back so soon—what is the matter, has aught frightened you?

LUCY. Oh, ma'am — I — I met Milord Devereaux here on the Manor grounds, but a little distance from the house —

PRUDENCE. Here, in the park? How came he past the lodge-keeper's gate?

LUCY. There is a break in the stone wall, ma'am, to the east of the old oak — (*She is badly frightened.*)

PRUDENCE. Quickly, Lucy, what then?

LUCY. He — he startled me; I came upon him in the shadows. When I gave him your message, he was all for hastening hither with me; but I protested you were not quite prepared. Then, of a sudden, he questioned me as to who was here at the Manor, and I was so taken aback and frightened, I had not the wit to lie about it.

PRUDENCE. Then — he knows we two are here alone?

LUCY. Yes, ma'am. Oh, what have we done?

PRUDENCE (*listening and speaking impatiently*). Oh, cease your sniffling, girl. Someone's coming. Do you get my cloak and bring it here.

LUCY. Yes, ma'am. (*Exit right.*)

PRUDENCE (*as a knock sounds at the French window*). Pray come in, Milord.

(MILORD DEVEREAUX *enters, standing in the opening a moment until* PRUDENCE *concludes her speech. He removes his hat with an elegant gesture.*)

I — I beg you'll pardon the unceremonious manner of my invitation — I — (*She is very demure and fluttery on purpose.*)

DEVEREAUX (*coming toward her and making a courtly bow*). Mistress Van Hayden, whatever the reasons for your summons, you see in me your humble debtor, grateful for even a glimpse of Paradise, no matter how brief.

PRUDENCE (*bowing to him*). You have a ready tongue, I see.

LUCY (*entering with cloak which she puts across back of armchair front, left. She hesitates, and turns toward Prudence*). Your cloak, ma'am.

PRUDENCE. Thank you, Lucy, you may go.

LUCY (*with an uneasy glance at Devereaux who sees the by-play between the girls.*) But Miss Prudence, I —

PRUDENCE. But what, Lucy?

(*She dismisses Lucy with a glance. Lucy toward center to take Devereaux's hat and cloak. She places them on table, left, at lower end of table.*)

DEVEREAUX (*smiling*). I fear your little maid regards me with less approval than is due an invited guest, Mistress Van Hayden.

PRUDENCE (*sitting on bench and regarding Devereaux with a smile*). Why should she, sir? Is there any reason to? Lucy, go! (*Lucy exits right.*) Had I the slightest doubt of you, Milord, surely I would not have asked your protection on my way tonight.

DEVEREAUX (*coming forward and looking down at her*). So, I am to be Beauty's guide tonight, eh? A charming task! And may I ask the destination?

PRUDENCE. To the Rout, sir. To be brief — my escort failed me. Report hath it that tonight will be the first time they do the new dances, ones lately seen on the Continent — I love to dance — (*She shrugs her shoulders suggestively.*) So — I had neither the courage nor the heart to be denied the pleasure.

DEVEREAUX. Then you make me more your debtor than before. I am but lately returned from abroad myself, and —

PRUDENCE. Then you know the steps?

DEVEREAUX. To be sure.

PRUDENCE. You'll teach them to me?

DEVEREAUX (*bowing*). Ay! Let me think — what was the tune? Ah, yes I recall it now. I tried to keep it in my head while I was dancing with Mademoiselle de la Greuze. She talked and I hummed. 'Twas quite enchanting.

PRUDENCE (*surprised and pleased*). Mademoiselle de la Greuze? You danced with her — one of the most beautiful ladies in France?

DEVEREAUX. Beautiful? *Perhaps.* (*Looking down languishingly at Prudence, who drops her eyes.*) But I find our own ladies infinitely more attractive.

PRUDENCE (*delighted*). Flatterer!

(*They both laugh gaily.*)

DEVEREAUX (*humming a tune suitable for a Minuet; although, if possible, it adds to the dream effect to have the music played offstage on a violin. Prudence seated on the bench, watches him. He is a fascinating figure*

as he goes through the intricacies of the dance.) You see? (*Holding out his hand.*) And now —

PRUDENCE (*all sparkles*). I doubt not there are parts I shall forget —

(*They dance together. Prudence flirts with him outrageously. She makes a few mistakes, but they laugh at them. They make a charming picture, and she reaches the end regretfully.*)

DEVEREAUX. You are an apt pupil, Mistress.

PRUDENCE. You think so, sir?

DEVEREAUX. And now — your cloak?

PRUDENCE. On yonder chair, Milord.

DEVEREAUX. (*Getting her cloak. Comes back, holds the cloak open. She goes to him, expecting him to throw it about her shoulders. As he does so, he catches her tightly in his arms, swings her about and kisses her fiercely on the lips.*) So —

PRUDENCE. Milord, let me free!

DEVEREAUX. But why?

PRUDENCE. Let me loose, or I'll call our men!

DEVEREAUX (*easily, laughing at her*). Surely you do not think your voice will carry to King's Inn?

PRUDENCE. I did not call you here for this!

DEVEREAUX (*quickly, as he holds her as in a vise*). Then playing with fire is dangerous, my dear. (*As she struggles.*) No, no, now that I have snared the bird I mean to hold it. Ah, we Devereaux have an eye for beauty.

(*He leans to kiss her again. She screams. There is the sound of steps inside. With a swift movement, Devereaux holds her in his right arm, and with his left hand, snuffs out the candle. The stage is black. Claps his hand over her mouth and draws her into shadow of upper left corner.*)

TROWBRIDGE (*entering through French window and standing in the darkness, as though trying to accustom himself to it*). Prudence! Madam Van Hayden! Lucy! Egad, where *is* everyone! I swear I heard voices and saw a light. (*Pause.*) Are you doing this to plague me, Prue, because I was detained? Odds life, what kind of game is this? Prudence, are you here? Speak out, I tell you. (*There is a scuffling in corner as Prudence struggles. Trowbridge wheels and faces sound.*) There's someone skulking there in the dark; but it's so damnably black I can see nothing.

PRUDENCE (*freeing her mouth from Devereaux's hand*). ROBERT!

DEVEREAUX. Sh!

PRUDENCE. Oh, Robert, take care, Milord Devereaux is here!

TROWBRIDGE. *Devereaux? Here?*

DEVEREAUX (*emerging from the darkness, quite at his ease. The two men stand center. If possible, a soft spot may be used to illumine the figures of the men, although it is not at all necessary, or bring up blue foots slightly*). The, ah — lady craved my company, sir. I assure you, I came *only* at *her* bidding.

TROWBRIDGE. That's a damned lie, sir. The doors of Crawford Manor have never been open to your kind.

DEVEREAUX (*still smiling*). No? Then, why not ask the lady, sir? (*Trowbridge draws his sword from the scabbard.*) You question my veracity, sir? You mean to *fight!* (*He laughs as though he found the situation rarely amusing.*) Then sir, on guard! (*Draws his sword.*)

PRUDENCE. *Robert!* No, no! He is an expert duellist. Lucy, where are you? Bring a taper. Oh, why don't you come?

(*She moves across back of stage calling. The men begin to fight. Devereaux is an accomplished swordsman, sure of himself, having a thoroughly enjoyable time. He laughs, then talks, then laughs again. Robert fights quietly, but desperately, knowing he is no match for his adversary.*)

DEVEREAUX. You should take some lessons, puppy! There is no polish to your style. (*As Robert makes an awkward lunge.*) Gad, man, a battle-axe would suit you better!

(*They describe two circles, center, as they fight, then make a circle about the divan, right. Trowbridge is touched in the wrist and makes an exclamation.*)

PRUDENCE. Milord Devereaux, stop, stop! He's wounded!

TROWBRIDGE. Prudence! Come on Devereaux, we'll see the end of this!

DEVEREAUX (*fictitiously regretful*). So — you mean to finish it? (*Having completed circle of divan, they are once more going toward center.*) This is too bad, sir; for you seem very young — (*He lunges and wounds Trowbridge mortally.*) to — die.

TROWBRIDGE (*dropping his sword with a clatter and sinking to floor*). God!

PRUDENCE (*guided by the sound of his voice she hurries to him and kneels on floor beside him*). Robert! Robert!

DEVEREAUX (*still highly amused, he goes for hat and cloak, as he sheathes sword. Pauses at window a moment before he exits*). I bid you good-night, Mistress. And the next time you have need of me, or crave entertainment of a like nature — (*he bows a flourish.*) I am at your service. (*Exit.*)

PRUDENCE (*the spell is broken at Devereaux's exit*). Oh, where is Lucy — let me get a light.

TROWBRIDGE. No, no, Prue. (*Clings to her.*) There isn't time. His weapon went too deep —

PRUDENCE (*with his head supported against her breast*). Oh my dear, my dear, what have I done?

TROWBRIDGE. Take my hand, Prue. Hold it. Tighter, tighter! (*He laughs faintly.*) Oh, how the gods must have laughed when you were christened "Prudence." How they must have laughed. (*He continues with difficulty.*) Promise me no one shall know the truth. Afterwards — tell them — I was beset by ruffians on my way here — wounded — and, oh, God! — why does everything seem so black — (*He looks up at her face.*) I can't — even — see — your — face.

PRUDENCE (*hysterically*). Oh, Robert, I'm to blame, my silly pride and anger, my impatience —

TROWBRIDGE. I — I — love you so, Prue — and — loving you — there is some happiness in — dying — for —

you — (*His voice trails away and he pitches face down on floor.*)

PRUDENCE (*frantic*). Robert, speak to me, do you hear. (*She holds tightly to him.*) Tell me you forgive me. I bade Lucy ask Milord Devereaux to come. Oh, why don't you answer me?

(*The stage grows pitch black. Trowbridge rises quickly, exits left, taking with him his own sword, which he must return to scabbard, and Prudence's cloak which she must hand him in the darkness. The cloak he gives to Nettie backstage. Prudence gropes her way to divan and falls upon it, sobbing. When Nettie crosses stage to admit Townsend later, she must carry on the cloak and place it over chair left, just as she did in the dream.*)

Oh, it's all so dark. Mother! Mother! Mother! Why don't you come? (*She is sobbing.*)

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*hurries on from right, followed by Nettie carrying a many-branched candlestick lighted. Nettie puts candlestick on table. Stage brightens. Mrs. Van Hayden goes to divan and sits beside Eleanor*). My dear, whatever *is* the matter?

ELEANOR (*still in the throes of her dream as Prudence*). There on the floor, mother, Robert — dead. I've killed him, mother; I've killed him.

NETTIE (*investigating*). There's divil a t'ing here, Mrs. Van Hayden.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*understanding*). Just a moment, Nettie. She's been dreaming. (*Shakes Eleanor gently.*) Wake up, dear, it's mother.

ELEANOR (*rousing, bewildered*). Why, I — (*Looks down at floor, center.*) That's funny.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. You've been dreaming, dear.

ELEANOR. Dreaming? Why, I haven't even been asleep, have I? And there *was* the feel of blood on my hands, all warm and sticky.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Nettie, get my smelling salts, please.

NETTIE. I will that! (*Exit right.*)

ELEANOR (*still tearful and shaken*). Mother, it's been the strangest thing. It was all so perfectly clear and horrible. The swords and the darkness, and then, he just grew perfectly limp in my arms —

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Who, my dear?

ELEANOR. Young Trowbridge, of course.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*racking her brain to recall something*). Young Trowbridge? *That* name certainly sounds familiar.

NETTIE (*returning with smelling salts bottle open, and holding it as far from her nose as she can*). I nivir could see the use of *this sthuff* for *revivin'* faintin' humanity. Shure, the strength of it would knock an illiphunt out complately. (*Hands bottle to Mrs. Van Hayden.*)

ELEANOR. Oh, mother, I don't need that — I'm all right.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*putting salts bottle on telephone table*). Nettie, when you go outside, please tell cook

not to do any more experimenting with those fuses — she's put out every light in the apartment. If there's trouble, have an electrician come immediately.

NETTIE. Yes, ma'am. (*Exit right.*)

ELEANOR. Mother, who was Robert Trowbridge?

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. It seems to me he was connected with the early history of the Van Hayden family — they always mentioned him with regret whenever they discussed the family —

ELEANOR (*quickly*). Skeleton, mother? the dear old, family skeleton?

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Dear me, no. The family *tree.*

ELEANOR. Then the Van Haydens never had any family skeleton? (*She is curious.*)

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. No, they've always been a family remarkably free from scandals and questionable characters. Let me see, Trowbridge? Oh, yes, I do recall now. He doubtless *would* have been one of your ancestors if he'd lived. But he was murdered one night by a band of ruffians who tried to rob him on his way to call upon your great-great-aunt —

ELEANOR. So that's why she never married?

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. I suppose so. At any rate, he just managed to reach the house, and died in her arms.

ELEANOR. And this diary is hers — *Prudence* — that's queer — (*She is very thoughtful and sober.*)

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. What, dear?

ELEANOR (*recovering herself, but strangely softened*). I was just wondering — oh, nothing. (*Door-bell rings off left.*) Oh, mother, if that's Dick, I've got to see him right away. (*She jumps up hurriedly.*)

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Dick? Eleanor, you surely don't expect Dick will come here after the way you talked to him.

(*Nettie crosses from right to left to answer bell, carrying Eleanor's cloak, which she places over chair, left.*)

ELEANOR. Then I'll have to call him up or something. Mother, I simply *must* speak to him.

MRS. VAN HAYDEN. Well, I'm sure I don't know how to reach him — it's too late. And undoubtedly Nettie is now admitting that very questionable Lothario Blake, or whatever his name is.

ELEANOR. Then if it's Phil, please tell him — no, never mind, mother. I'd better do it myself. After I've powdered my nose. (*She laughs rather shakily.*) I've shed real tears over nothing but a dream, and I know I'm a mess. (*Exit right quickly.*)

(*Nettie ushers Townsend in. He wears his masquerade costume. Puts his cloak over a chair. Nettie exits right.*)

MRS. VAN HAYDEN (*holding her hands out to him*). Richard the Lion-Hearted! So, you *did* come after all.

TOWNSEND. Madam mother, could I do anything else? (*He bows over her hand and kisses it in the oldtime manner. Then he straightens up and laughs.*) I feel as if I ought to be saying "Egad! Zounds! and Sirrah!" in this outfit.

Mrs. Van Hayden (*moving toward left*). Sword and all! Turn around slowly, Richard. Let me feast my eyes upon you. Yes, it's simply stunning. (*She sighs.*) What days those must have been. I feel I was born much too late. How *could* any girl in her right mind have helped loving a man, if he looked as you do?

Townsend (*laughing*). Careful there! You don't want to make me blush, do you?

Mrs. Van Hayden. Just the same, I'd like to start a movement to revive the fashion.

Townsend (*chuckling as he holds out the skirts of his coat and minces about daintily*). Oh, yes! Just the thing for the subway crowds!

Mrs. Van Hayden. The *sword* might be very useful. (*She starts toward right.*) I'll have Eleanor come at once. Dick, — (*She turns back toward him again.*) I just want to whisper a word to the wise. Oh dear, I suppose I'm a conspirator, and against my own precious infant, too; but something's happened — Eleanor wants desperately to see you, so — sh!

Townsend (*catching her hands and holding them*). Aha! Treason in the ranks. Sh! Madam, I love *you* next to your daughter.

Mrs. Van Hayden (*her bantering manner gone*). Richard, Eleanor's my baby — all I have in the world. She's headstrong, too modern. She'll need a firm hand at times, I'm afraid. Don't let her slip away from you. I know her father would have been happy to have you as a son. We had such a short time together — I — (*She looks at him intently for a moment, then touches him gently on the*

shoulder.) Good luck to you, boy. (*Exits rapidly, right.*)

(*Townsend walks to table, left, and stands there so only his back is visible to Eleanor as she enters.*)

ELEANOR (*entering and speaking rapidly with an effort*). Phil — I — hardly know how to explain — I don't know what you'll think of me; but I can't go with you to-night — I —

TOWNSEND (*turning to face her*). Well —

ELEANOR (*amazed*). Dick! it's *you!* Oh, you darling. (*She hurries toward him, puts out her hand, then draws back hesitatingly.*) You *are* real, aren't you? Oh, I'm so mixed up — it's been so queer. I turned into my own great-great-aunt, and I killed somebody — Young Trowbridge — no, you — no — (*She turns away from him.*) Oh, dear, I hope you don't mind a little light-headedness in the family. (*Turns toward him again, and going to him in a rush clings to him.*) Oh, Dickie, I thought I'd lost you — I thought I'd lost you!

TOWNSEND (*taking her in his arms*). Nell — you — you *do* love me, after all?

ELEANOR. I do, Dick, I do!

TOWNSEND. Then — are we engaged?

ELEANOR (*looking up at him shyly, then turning away*). You — you really haven't *asked* me yet.

TOWNSEND. Then I'll remedy that directly. (*He turns her about so that he looks into her face.*) Eleanor — I *love* you.

ELEANOR. I love you, too, Dick.

TOWNSEND. And you'll marry me?

ELEANOR. Yes, Dick.

TOWNSEND. All settled then?

ELEANOR. Yes —

TOWNSEND. You darling. (*He kisses her tenderly and holds her to him for a moment.*) And now for the coach and pair, eh?

(*Gets their cloaks, puts hers about her and as he does so he catches her in his arms again and kisses her. The action recalls her dream to mind again. For a moment she is bewildered — then she remembers Phil.*)

ELEANOR. Oh, my heavens! Phil! I forgot *all* about him!

TOWNSEND (*easily as he urges her off left*). Oh, that's all right. You needn't worry about him.

ELEANOR. No, Dickie dear, you don't understand. He's coming here for me. I'll have to let him know. He's on his way here now.

TOWNSEND. No, he isn't.

ELEANOR. Yes, really he is. I asked him to come.

TOWNSEND. Yes, I know you did; but I've disposed of him.

ELEANOR. You what? (*She is horrified for the moment.*)

TOWNSEND. I met him outside when I reached here and I told him you'd changed your mind.

ELEANOR. *Changed my mind? How did you guess I'd ask Phil Blake to take me?*

TOWNSEND. Intuition, sweetheart, intuition. He's the handsomest man you know.

ELEANOR (*she chuckles, then draws back, assumes the oldtime manner, and looks at him pertly*). Zounds, sirrah! Methinks you have a ready wit!

TOWNSEND (*echoing her laughter as she curtseys and he bows elegantly*). Oddso, my lass! I' faith, I think I *have!*

(*They look at each other for a moment, then revert to present-day mannerisms, and with his arm about her, they hurry off left.*)

CURTAIN

THE MOST FOOLISH VIRGIN

A SYMBOLIC FANTASY IN ONE ACT

BY

HELEN GERTRUDE GASKILL

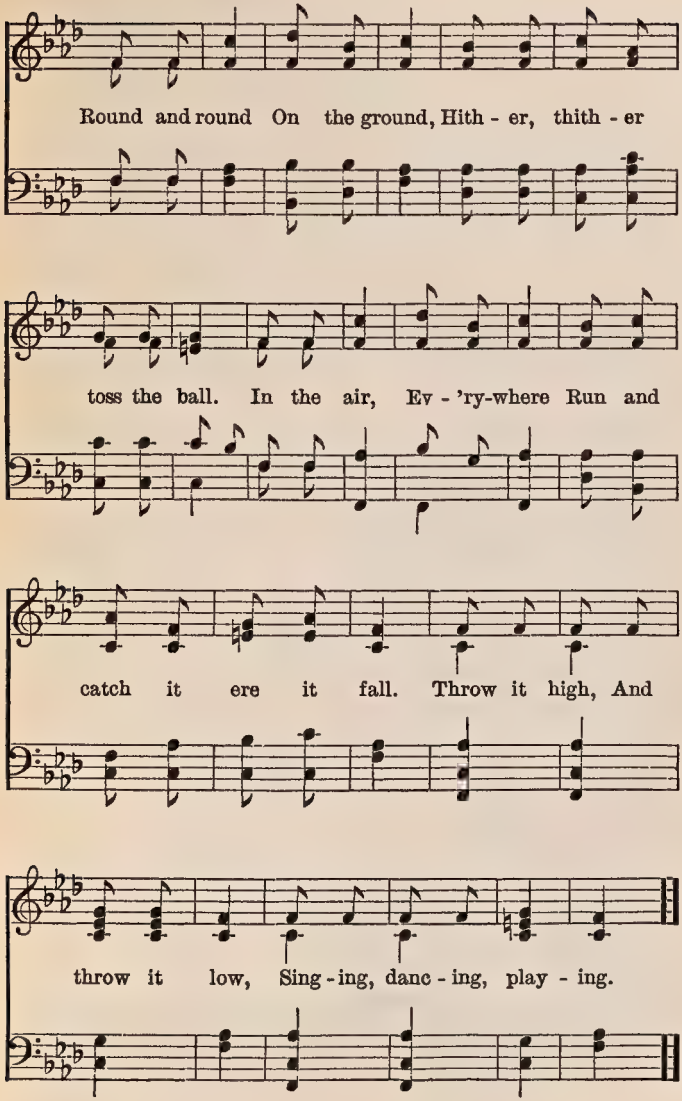
CHARACTERS

Mela	*The Daughter of the King*
First Virgin Second Virgin Third Virgin Fourth Virgin	*Her Handmaidens*
Vallaria	*A Virgin of Noble Birth*
Sixth Virgin Seventh Virgin	*Her Handmaidens*
Candila	*A Matron of the Court*
Zonula	*A Slave Girl*
An Oil Merchant	
The Bridegroom	

Time: — *Nearer the Present than we think.*

Scene: — *The king's court.*

The Most Foolish Virgin


Round and round On the ground, Hith - er, thith - er
toss the ball. In the air, Ev - 'ry-where Run and
catch it ere it fall. Throw it high, And
throw it low, Sing - ing, danc - ing, play - ing.

THE MOST FOOLISH VIRGIN

The scene will be most simply and effectively arranged if curtains of a dark, rich colour are used instead of flats. Rear center, the curtains are drawn apart, revealing wide low steps. After the fourth or fifth rise, the steps should turn to right and left, the landing thus formed being blocked by another curtain, or else finished with a railing, making a sort of balcony beyond which sky is visible. Side right and left of the stage, entrances. Stage center, a low fountain playing. (If it is impossible to procure the small electric fountain necessary for this effect, the whole may be conveniently omitted, and a bench or sundial substituted.) On each side of the fountain, a seat.

The scene opens with First, Second, Third, and Fourth Virgins at play, tossing a golden ball gaily from one to another, singing as they play. Zonula, a beautiful girl, whose dark luxuriant hair hangs loose over her shoulders, is seated at the edge of the fountain watching them. She is dressed in a scant, yellow dress; her legs are bare, and only sandals protect her feet.

First Virgin (*singing*).
Round and Round
On the ground.

(*She bounces the ball on the ground, and passes it to the Second Virgin.*)

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SECOND VIRGIN (*singing*).
Hither thither,
Toss the ball.

(*She throws the ball into the air and catches it, passing it on to the Third Virgin.*)

THIRD VIRGIN (*singing*).
In the air; everywhere,
Who can catch it ere it fall?

(*She throws it laughing to the Fourth Virgin.*)

FOURTH VIRGIN (*singing*).
Throw it high; throw it low,
Singing, dancing, playing.

ZONULA (*jumping up and catching the ball*). I can play too. I know the song now. (*She begins to sing, tossing the ball in the air and catching it again.*)
Round and round,
On the ground.
Hither thither,
Toss the ball.
In the air; everywhere,
Who can catch it ere it fall?
Throw it high, throw it low,
Singing, dancing, playing.

FIRST VIRGIN. You are a slave girl, Zonula.

SECOND VIRGIN. Often and often do we tell you that.

ZONULA. Yes, often and often have I heard you.

THIRD VIRGIN (*going over to her*). When you have been longer in the King's court, you will be proud that you are one of Mela's slaves.

ZONULA (*arrested in her play*). Is Mela so very beautiful?

FOURTH VIRGIN. The King calls her the most beautiful girl in all the land.

ZONULA. But the King is her father. In my country, my father thought that even I was beautiful.

FIRST VIRGIN. You.

(*There is slight laughter among them. They begin to move about.*)

FOURTH VIRGIN. Come, the ball.

ZONULA. Let me play, and I will throw it to you.

THIRD VIRGIN. Let her play with us. She can do no harm.

SECOND VIRGIN. But Mela! Mela will see.

ZONULA. Oh, will Mela come here? Shall I really see her? Then I shall know if she is beautiful.

FIRST VIRGIN. The King *says* that she is beautiful.

SECOND VIRGIN. He says no one in all the land approaches her in beauty.

ZONULA. More beautiful than Vallaria?

THE VIRGINS (*starting*). Vallaria! (*They laugh nervously.*)

THIRD VIRGIN. Vallaria is but a virgin of the Court. Mela is the daughter of the King.

FIRST VIRGIN. And you are Mela's slave.

FOURTH VIRGIN. Where have you seen Vallaria?

ZONULA. Here in this Court. I saw her one night when I was here alone.

FIRST VIRGIN. What were you doing alone in the King's Court?

ZONULA. I had come out to count the stars. That is what we do in my country. We count the stars.

SECOND VIRGIN. But no one has ever been able to count the stars.

ZONULA. That is why we never grow tired doing it.

FIRST VIRGIN. You are a silly child, Zonula. When you have been longer in the Court you will learn wisdom. Come, the ball. (*She picks up the ball which Zonula has dropped, and sings.*)
Round and round
On the ground.

(*She tosses it on the ground and then to the Second Virgin.*)

SECOND VIRGIN.
Hither thither
Toss the ball.

ZONULA (*seeing that she is to be left out*). Vallaria says you play too much. She says, because you play you will not know the hour when the Prince arrives.

(*The Virgins stop abruptly.*)

FIRST VIRGIN. You should not have listened to Vallaria.

ZONULA. How could I help it? She spoke to me.

FOURTH VIRGIN (*curiously*). Did Vallaria say more to you?

THIRD VIRGIN. No. What difference! We care not what she said.

FOURTH VIRGIN. I only wondered.

SECOND VIRGIN. Perchance Vallaria knows the day and hour when the Prince will come. Perchance she told Zonula.

FIRST VIRGIN. Not Vallaria. Whatever she may know, she would not tell a slave of Mela.

FOURTH VIRGIN. It could not hurt to ask the child. (*To Zonula.*) Zonula, slave, come here.

FIRST VIRGIN. What more, Zonula, did Vallaria say?

ZONULA. Why do you ask?

FOURTH VIRGIN. Because we wish to know.

ZONULA (*laughing*). That does not answer me.

(*She picks up the ball and dances off with it, stage right. The others remain in a group, stage left. Zonula stands holding the ball, looking at them half in defiance, half in jest.*)

FIRST VIRGIN. 'Tis well that Mela does not hear you, Slave.

FOURTH VIRGIN (*reluctant to let the subject drop*). Vallaria said nothing of the Prince?

ZONULA. Oh, yes. She said that he would come with trumpet and with bugle blasts; that all the town should crowd into the streets; that bells should ring, and banners fly.

FOURTH VIRGIN. Yes, yes. Go on.

ZONULA. That here within the castle walls the virgins of the land should meet him.

FIRST VIRGIN. And he will choose our Mela for his bride.

ZONULA. She did not speak of Mela.

FIRST VIRGIN. No, no, she would not.

SECOND VIRGIN. At what hour did she say we may await his coming?

ZONULA. She said to watch.

FOURTH VIRGIN. But at what hour?

ZONULA. She said to wait.

FIRST VIRGIN. Come, the truth.

THIRD VIRGIN. Zonula, it is best to tell us all she said.

ZONULA (*backing off*). No. I cannot tell you more.

SECOND VIRGIN. Why not?

ZONULA. Vallaria said no more.

FOURTH VIRGIN. I doubt she speaks the truth.

(*Mela enters right. She is tall and beautiful and richly gowned. The laugh on her lips dies as she overhears Zonula's words.*)

MELA. Vallaria! Who speaks my rival's name?

FIRST VIRGIN. The slave, Zonula.

MELA. And who is she?

THIRD VIRGIN. She is the youngest slave girl in the King, Your Father's Court.

(*Mela turns and looks at her.*)

ZONULA. Oh, you are beautiful.

MELA (*laughing despite herself*). The child speaks frankly.

FIRST VIRGIN. The child is impudent.

SECOND VIRGIN. She has spoken with Vallaria.

FOURTH VIRGIN. And knows, we think, the hour of the Bridegroom's coming.

MELA. The hour when he comes! What luck! (*She laughs.*)

SECOND VIRGIN. Only she will not tell us.

MELA. Not tell? (*She laughs again.*) She will tell me. Come, sit here before me, Child. (*She seats herself on the bench right. Zonula sits at her feet.*) And so, we are to know the hour when the Bridegroom comes.(*She pauses expectantly.*)

MELA (*flatteringly, when Zonula says nothing*). What pretty hair the child has. It is your greatest treasure, Slave. (*She waits again.*) Come, what did Vallaria say?

ZONULA. She too said I had pretty hair. (*Mela is taken aback.*) My father used to say it shown like armour in the sun. My mother braided it.

MELA. Zonula, I am the daughter of the King. You have been speaking with someone whom you should not know; one who seeks to deprive me of that which I most wish to have.

ZONULA. Vallaria?

MELA. Tell me. What has Vallaria said to you?

ZONULA. She said to watch.

MELA. Yes. Until what hour?

ZONULA. She said to wait.

FIRST VIRGIN. Little Fool! You are a slave.

ZONULA (*rising*). In my country my Father says we all are slaves until we make ourselves free.

MELA. And so you would be friends with Vallaria, my rival.

ZONULA. Yes, I like her very much.

SECOND VIRGIN. His Majesty, the King, will punish you for this.

MELA. No. In our Court we do not threaten. Life is too short, and we too young and happy. Displeased though I am, Zonula shall know that happiness reigns here. Come. Music. Let us dance. And Zonula, slave though she be, Zonula shall dance too. (*She pauses and looks at Zonula.*) And you will tell me when the dance is over. Come.

(*Off-stage music is played. The Virgins fall, two to stage right, two to stage left. Mela takes center. They begin their dance. Zonula, instead of joining, draws down stage right, watching. Gradually as the dance proceeds she forgets everything except her delight in the dance. Suddenly Candila enters left. She is a matron of middle age.*)

CANDILA. Make haste. Prepare. The Bridegroom comes.

(*The dancers' dance comes to an abrupt end. The music dies down slowly.*)

MELA. He comes? The Bridegroom? Where? Where is he?

ZONULA. Shall I hear the trumpet blasts, and bells and bugles sounding?

FIRST VIRGIN. Peace. You speak too much.

FOURTH VIRGIN. And not at all when you are asked to.

MELA (*starting toward Candila, and checking herself. To her handmaidens*). My scarf. My golden comb. My mirror. Make haste.

(*The Virgins exeunt right.*)

MELA (*turning to Candila*). How near is he? Already at the King, my Father's, gate?

CANDILA (*sadly seating herself on a bench*). Oh, Mela, I did not think to find you thus.

MELA. To find me thus? Candila, I do not understand. (*She kneels before her, taking both her hands.*) The Bridegroom comes and you are sad.

CANDILA (*suddenly catching Mela to her*). Mela, my child, you whom I have watched from babyhood, growing in strength and beauty. Daily, hourly, have I waited for this minute, trusting to find you ready. And now — at last he comes — and you — Oh Mela, my beloved child! Vallaria, Vallaria — (*She rises, choking back her tears.*)

MELA. Candila, am I not fully grown? Am I not beautiful?

CANDILA (*sadly*). Yes.

MELA. Candila, you are not satisfied?

CANDILA. Vallaria is fully grown. Vallaria is beautiful.

MELA. I am the daughter of the King.

CANDILA. Your Father's greatness will not buy the same for you.

MELA. Candila, since first the King, my Father, knew the princely Bridegroom meant to find his bride within our land, I have been chosen for that bride.

(*Vallaria enters left followed by her two handmaidens. Vallaria is stately and dignified. All three carry lighted lamps. Mela, looking up, sees that she has been overheard.*)

MELA. Vallaria! You come into my Father's Court without a sound, as though you were afraid. The herald should have brought us word.

VALLARIA. I come in haste with tidings.

MELA. Ah, you are no messenger to us. We know. The Bridegroom comes.

VALLARIA. You are mistaken. It is a false alarm. He does not come.

MELA. Not come! Oh, Candila.

ZONULA. Then there shall be no trumpet calls. The music will not play. I shall not see the virgins of the land.

MELA. Silence, Slave. (*To Vallaria.*) You say the Bridegroom does not come?

VALLARIA. Not yet.

MELA. Ah, but later. When? At what hour?

VALLARIA. I do not know.

MELA. Perchance, you know and will not tell. Vallaria, don't seek by tricks to keep me from the Bridegroom's feast.

VALLARIA. No man knows the hour, Mela.

MELA. How may I know if this be true? Perhaps it is a ruse to keep me off my guard.

VALLARIA. Guard! I did not know you kept a guard.

MELA. You think because I do not sit with lighted lamp gazing across the plains that bound my Father's city, that the Bridegroom will not find me worthy;— will not choose me, the daughter of the King.

VALLARIA (*with scorn*). *I* know the Bridegroom's wishes.

MELA. You think you do.

CANDILA. You are too sure, Vallaria. It is not wise.

VALLARIA. He shall come and find me ready.

MELA (*laughing*). Pale from fasting, red eyed and weary, he shall find you. Vallaria, he will not look at you.

VALLARIA. And you, my Princess, will be spent with play.

MELA. All day you moon about the court, holding your lighted lamp. A lighted lamp! (*She laughs.*) *It* will not guide you to the wedding feast.

VALLARIA. It is the signal that I watch and wait.

MELA. You make the Prince a taskmaker, and us his toiling slaves. No, if such he were, I would not be his bride.

VALLARIA. You will not be his bride.

FIRST VIRGIN (*entering right*). Mela, your scarf.

MELA. I shall not want it now.

SECOND VIRGIN (*entering right*). Your golden comb.

MELA. Take it away. (*She draws down stage in wrath.*)

THIRD VIRGIN (*entering right*). The mirror that you wanted.

(*Mela takes it and throws it on the floor.*)

ZONULA. Oh!

CANDILA (*rising, her hands over her eyes*). My dream returns. 'Tis vague, and yet, again I think I see the Bridegroom coming.

MELA. Your dream? You mean, for dreams you so disturbed us?

CANDILA. I feel him near. 'Tis he.

(*The others are arrested.*)

VALLARIA. Where Candila? How near?

MELA. Candila, your dreams can not again deceive us.

CANDILA. Believe me. I see true. He comes.

VALLARIA (*to her handmaidens*). Hold high your lamps.

MELA (*to her handmaidens*). My golden comb.

ZONULA. Oh, shall I see him too?

(*She runs to the steps and looks off rear. The others stand tense. Suddenly, off stage left, the oil merchant begins to chant his song.*)

THE OIL MERCHANT (*chanting*).
Buy oil of me. Buy oil of me.
All those who will the Bridegroom see.

ZONULA. The oil merchant.

MELA (*sinking onto a bench*). Oh!

THE OIL MERCHANT (*approaching*).
Buy oil of me. Keep bright your lights.
Be ready for the wedding rites.

ZONULA. See, he comes here.

MELA. Send him away. I cannot bear his song.

SIXTH VIRGIN. No, Vallaria. My lamp needs oil.

SEVENTH VIRGIN. And mine.

CANDILA. Mine too.

OIL MERCHANT (*entering left*).
Buy oil of me. Guard well your flame.
The Bridegroom comes his Bride to name.

(*Candila, Vallaria, the Sixth and Seventh Virgins draw around the merchant, who fills their lamps. Zonula stands watching.*)

MELA (*rising and drawing apart in the anger of disappointment*). Oh!

MERCHANT (*to Zonula*). Where is your lamp?

ZONULA. I am a slave.

SEVENTH VIRGIN. You mean because you are a slave, you do not wait the Bridegroom's coming?

ZONULA. Yes, I am a slave.

MELA. The slave is mine.

CANDILA. Ah, Mela, Mela. Good Merchant, fill the Princess's lamp with oil.

MELA. I do not want it filled.

SIXTH VIRGIN. At least the slave should be allowed to join the wedding feast.

MELA. My slave girl at my wedding feast! (*She laughs.*) You jest. My slave!

VALLARIA. You are a foolish Virgin.

MELA. I am the daughter of the King. (*She starts out right.*) Come. Let the Bridegroom find us dancing with delight.

FIRST VIRGIN (*picking up the ball, and singing*).
In the air,
Everywhere.

(*She tosses the ball.*)

SECOND VIRGIN.
Hither, thither, toss the ball.
Who can catch it ere it fall?

(*Mela and her handmaidens exeunt right.*)

VALLARIA (*leading her maidens up the steps*). Come. Watch here with me.

(*They seat themselves on the steps, holding their lighted lamps. Candila follows wearily. The Oil Merchant heaves a deep sigh, and sits down on the bench.*)

ZONULA (*turning to him*). In my country the virgins marry whom they will. No Bridegroom comes to make unrest like this. We are much happier.

OIL MERCHANT. The Bridegroom's coming was not meant to be so. The Court splits into factions. Factions! Each one fighting with the other! The Bridegroom will not like it.

ZONULA. How do you know?

OIL MERCHANT. I know.

ZONULA. In this country, each one is so certain that he knows.

OIL MERCHANT. And in yours?

ZONULA. Only he who can count the stars can know.

OIL MERCHANT. Who will he be?

ZONULA. No one. No one can count the stars.

(*The Oil Merchant smiles to himself.*)

ZONULA (*hesitatingly*). Tell me, if you know, how will he come? With happy songs and trumpet blasts?

OIL MERCHANT. Perhaps.

ZONULA (*going over to him*). Oh, I hope he will. That is the way I want him. I want the city to be filled with songs; the buglers on the city walls to blow with all their might. The bells must ring, and banners wave.

OIL MERCHANT. Suppose he comes at night. You have no oil to fill your lamp. He would pass you by unnoticed.

ZONULA. I have no money to buy oil.

OIL MERCHANT. Ah, I cannot give my oil away.

ZONULA (*thinking*). I have a trinket on my arm.

OIL MERCHANT (*eagerly*). Where is it?

ZONULA. Here. I do not like it much. You may have it gladly.

OIL MERCHANT. No. Then it will not do.

ZONULA. The sandals on my feet. You may have them. Mela will give me others.

OIL MERCHANT. No. Not them.

ZONULA. I have nothing else.

OIL MERCHANT. Well then, farewell. (*He turns to exit right.*)

ZONULA. Does it cost so very much?

OIL MERCHANT. From some, I take but little. From others, the greatest treasure that they have. (*He turns to go.*)

ZONULA (*slowly*). The greatest treasure that they have. (*She feels her hair, and stands hesitatingly. Then she takes her hands from her hair and looks up at him,*

only to find him near the gate. She calls him back brokenly.) Good Merchant. (*He turns.*) I have one treasure. (*He comes a step toward her.*) My hair. Good Merchant, my Father used to say it shone like armor in the sun. My Mother braided it. Mela just called it the greatest treasure that I have. — If I should cut it off, might I sell it for oil?

Oil Merchant (*going over to her and stroking her hair gently*). Yes, I will buy your hair.

Zonula. I love it very much.

Oil Merchant. You will not sell it, then?

Zonula. Yes, I will sell it. (*She tries to laugh.*) How funny I shall look without it! — You will wait here, until I come? It will not take me long to cut it off.

Oil Merchant (*reseating himself*). I will wait here.

Zonula. And you will fill my lamp with oil?

Oil Merchant. Yes.

(*She goes off left, still a little dubious.*)
(*The stage becomes perfectly dark, except for the lights in Virgins' and Candila's lamps, which move from time to time, showing that the watchers are not asleep. Off stage right, soft music is played, and Mela and her handmaidens are heard laughing. After a minute, Zonula reënters left. It is so dark that neither she nor the Merchant are visible.*)

Zonula (*calling*). Good Merchant — Good Merchant. — It has grown so very dark. — I cannot find my way to you. — If you would light my lamp. — Good Merchant? — You have not gone? You are still here? — Oh! —

You promised! — You remember? — And I have cut my hair. I have it here to give you. — Oh! What would my Father say? — Good Merchant. Oh, here is the bench he sat on. I never doubted he would still be here. My Father would be angry if he knew. — I have no other treasure now. — Good Merchant. — He has gone away. — No, here, — Yes, here he's left my lamp. And it is full of oil! And here beside it is the taper. — Now I shall have a light to see if you are here.

(*She kneels to light her lamp. Picking it up and rising, she turns full upon the Bridegroom sitting in the Merchant's seat. The stage lights coming on at this moment increase the flicker of her lamp. The Bridegroom is young and simply clad.*)

ZONULA (*startled*). Who are you?

BRIDEGROOM. I am the Bridegroom.

ZONULA. You? (*She stands staring at him.*)

BRIDEGROOM. Come, I do not mean to frighten you.

ZONULA. But not a bugle blows. No people crowd the street.

BRIDEGROOM. You greet me. Is not that enough?

ZONULA. Oh, I am not the princess.

BRIDEGROOM (*smiling*). No, I see you are not.

ZONULA. But you are just like ordinary men.

BRIDEGROOM (*rising*). Then you would rather have me come with pomp and retinue?

ZONULAR. Oh, no, I think I like you very much.
(*The Bridegroom laughs.*)

ZONULA. You laugh! Like other men!

BRIDEGROOM. Why shouldn't I?

ZONULA. I do not know. Only, they did not tell me you would laugh.

BRIDEGROOM. Come, Zonula, sit beside me here, and let us laugh together. Then we shall know each other better.

ZONULA (*sitting beside him*). What fun! The whole land waits your coming, while I, a slave girl, sit beside you here.

VALLARIA. I hear voices.

SIXTH VIRGIN. It is the slave girl talking with the Merchant.

VALLARIA. I thought I heard a stranger's voice.

ZONULA (*rising*). Vallaria! She will find you here, and you will marry her. Make haste. Could you not hide until I summon Mela?

BRIDEGROOM. Who is Vallaria? Who is Mela?

ZONULA. Do you not know? They are the Virgins who will marry you.

BRIDEGROOM. How do you know?

ZONULA. They tell me so. Oh, Good Bridegroom, *please* hide until I summon Mela.

BRIDEGROOM (*taking her hand*). Are you so fond of Mela?

ZONULA. I am her slave. Besides, she is so beautiful.

BRIDEGROOM. Beautiful! How much you think of beauty in this land. (*He passes his hand slowly over her rough, fresh cut hair.*) It does not please me.

ZONULA (*thinking he has reference to her hair*). Oh, no, it would not, Sir. It is fresh cut. I meant to sell it for some oil. The Merchant —

BRIDEGROOM (*smiling*). You too then meant to wait for me?

ZONULA. I am a slave girl, Sir.

VALLARIA. The voice continues. Let us seek its owner.

ZONULA. Vallaria comes. I will warn Mela.

(*She runs out right. Vallaria followed by Candila and her maidens comes down into the court.*)

VALLARIA. Who comes this hour of the night?

BRIDEGROOM. The Bridegroom waits.

VALLARIA. The Bridegroom! No! He comes! He comes! Oh, Virgins, it is he. (*She sinks onto her knees before him.*) My Lord.

CANDILA AND VIRGINS (*also sinking onto their knees*). My Lord.

(*The Bridegroom bows.*)

VALLARIA (*rising*). I am Vallaria, a Virgin of the Court.

CANDILA (*rising*). And I am Candila.

SIXTH AND SEVENTH VIRGINS (*rising*). And we, Vallaria's maidens.

(*The Bridegroom bows.*)

VALLARIA. My Lord, since first we knew that you would choose your Bride from out our land, we have not ceased to wait your coming.

SEVENTH VIRGIN. Nor let our lamps burn low.

CANDILA. Had we but had some warning —

VALLARIA. If but one trumpet sounded —

BRIDEGROOM. Who told you I should come with trumpet blasts or ride through yonder gate?

(*Mela enters in breathless haste. She wears the golden comb, and scarf. Her Virgins follow her. Zonula, running in last, passes them, and goes up to the Bridegroom.*)

ZONULA. See, Good Bridegroom. This is Mela.
(*The others start.*)

VALLARIA. Slave!

MELA. The slave speaks right, my Lord. I am Mela, Princess of the Land.

(*The Bridegroom bows.*)

MELA. I am the daughter of the King.

(*The Bridegroom bows again. Zonula suddenly laughs delightedly.*)

VALLARIA. *Slave!*

(*There is an uncomfortable pause.*)

MELA. We wait your orders, My Good Lord. Where is your wedding feast?

BRIDEGROOM. My feast is ready. My wedding tables spread.

MELA. Ah, whither must we go? (*She beckons her maidens.*)

VALLARIA. Hold high your lamps.

(*The Bridegroom starts toward the rear steps*).

VALLARIA. My Lord, *we* have not ceased to watch, nor let our lamps burn low. (*She starts to pass up the stairs.*)

MELA. My Lord, *we* have not ceased to sing, and dance for joy that you were coming to our land. (*She also presses forward.*)

BRIDEGROOM (*stepping before her*). Peace. No one may enter whose lamp does not burn bright.

VALLARIA (*laughing*). Did I not tell you this? (*She and her maidens pass Mela and start up the steps.*)

MELA. My Lord, I am the daughter of the King. (*She becomes frightened.*) You mean — you mean, because for joy we danced and sang together. — Oh, no, Good Bridegroom, you must be in jest. (*Receiving no answer, she suddenly becomes defiant.*) My Lord, since first the King, my Father, knew you meant to choose your bride from out this land, I have been chosen for that bride.

(*Vallaria and her maidens laugh.*)

MELA. You cannot so abase me. No!

(*She stands defiant; then slowly her spirit breaks, and she turns sobbing.*) Oh, what am I to do? What must I do? (*Her maidens cluster about her. The Bridegroom passes up the steps. Suddenly she rushes to the foot of*

the steps and flings out passionately.) How can you choose Vallaria as bride? She boasts no royal blood.

BRIDEGROOM (*turning impressively*). Mela, when all my guests are seated at my feast, I shall choose her who is best suited for my Bride.

VALLARIA. Good Bridegroom, it is so. We understand. (*She passes forward.*)

MELA (*catching sight of Zonula as she turns from the steps*). Zonula, slave, you came too late to warn me. 'Tis you who are to blame. The King, my Father, shall make you smart for this. (*She turns to the whole group.*) The King, my Father, shall avenge me. You shall see. He will not have me made a mock and sport of.

BRIDEGROOM. The slave girl's lamp burns too. She also is invited.

ZONULA. I?

MELA. My slave! (*She laughs.*) Look at the child. She has no hair. Good Bridegroom, we do not sit at meat with slaves. I scorn your feast.

(*Zonula passes timidly up the steps.*)

MELA (*sinking onto a bench*). It is too hard to bear. I did not know that men were cruel like this.

FIRST VIRGIN. It cannot be that he will pass us by.

THIRD VIRGIN. Peace. Perchance, the Bridegroom tests us.

FOURTH VIRGIN. We should have burned our lamps.

SECOND VIRGIN. It is too late to speak of them.

MELA. Oh, I cannot bear the shame. (*She rises, seeing that her last chance is almost gone, and kneels at the foot of the steps.*) Vallaria. Candila, have you no pity? I am the daughter of your King. I did not know. I am too young to know. Oh, Candila, have pity. Give me some oil of yours that I may burn my lamp. (*Her voice breaks.*) If I might only pass unto the feast. I ask no more. Vallaria may be his bride. (*Candila hesitates. Mela takes courage and mounts a step.*) But just a little, Candila. Your lamps are full. (*Candila starts to come down to Mela.*)

SIXTH VIRGIN. We have but just enough.

SEVENTH VIRGIN. If we should give our oil, there would not be enough for us.

VALLARIA. No, Candila, you are too late. We have but just enough. Pass on. The feast grows cold. (*She passes out rear, the Virgins following. Candila follows slowly.*)

CANDILA. Ah, most foolish Virgin.

MELA. Vallaria! Vallaria! O Candila!

(*She falls weeping on the steps.*) (*Zonula looks uncertainly at Mela, then she too passes up the steps, and exits rear. The Bridegroom exits last. As the last lamp is carried off, the stage becomes almost dark. There is no sound except Mela's and the four Virgins' weeping. Finally, a light is seen coming down the steps, and Zonula's voice is heard whispering.*)

ZONULA. Mela. Mela.

MELA (*raising herself*). Vallaria? Candila? You come?

ZONULA. No, it is your slave, Zonula. Make haste before he finds me gone.

MELA. What is it? Do I dream?

ZONULA. No. Take my oil, and pass unto the wedding feast.

MELA. Your oil? Zonula! Where is my lamp?

ZONULA. Take mine. Make haste. There is no time to lose.

MELA. Yes, give me yours. Ah, 'tis full of oil. (*She laughs.*) I shall yet grace the Bridegroom's wedding feast. Zonula, Slave, the King, my Father, shall repay you generously. (*She starts to run up the steps, pauses and comes back.*) Zonula.

ZONULA. Yes, my Princess.

MELA. Zonula, take my golden comb as your reward.

ZONULA. It will not help me, Mela.

MELA. My golden comb! You will not take it when I give it you.

ZONULA. I am a slave girl, Mela.

MELA. Well, then, farewell. (*She turns up the steps laughing, her Virgins following.*) No more can I be called most foolish of the Virgins.

ZONULA. No, I am she — most foolish of the Virgins.

(*She sinks onto the bench weeping. As Mela reaches the top step, there is a sudden burst of music and trumpets. Zonula jumps to her feet. The Bridegroom robed in a long white cloak appears on the top step. Mela and her maidens fall back in surprise. Candila and Vallaria with her maidens reappear on the balcony. The stage is flooded with light.*)

ZONULA. The trumpets blow. (*She runs to the foot of the steps.*)

BRIDEGROOM.
My guests are come. My doors are wide.
Now is the time I claim my Bride.

MELA. Ah, good Bridegroom, see; I also have a lighted lamp.

VALLARIA (*running down the stairs*). No, No. She has but lighted it. 'Tis we and we alone who have been vigilant.

BRIDEGROOM. Vallaria, you have been vigilant because you wished to come unto my feast. You burned your lamps only to receive reward. You did not burn them to give light to others or to me.

VALLARIA. But, my Lord —

MELA (*laughing*). Your little lamps. Your burning wicks on which you pinned your faith! Did I not say *they* would not guide you to the feast?

BRIDEGROOM. Peace, Mela. *You* did not even watch or wait. Your slave girl had to summon you.

ZONULA. Oh!

BRIDEGROOM. That slave girl is my Bride.

ZONULA. My Lord!

VALLARIA (*shrieking*). The slave!

MELA. Oh!

ZONULA. My Lord, I have not any hair.

BRIDEGROOM. You had and sold it. The oil you burned cost dear.

ZONULA. I have no lamp, good Bridegroom.

BRIDEGROOM. You had and gave it to another. (*He leads her toward the stairs.*)

ZONULA (*still holding back*). My Lord, I am a slave.

BRIDEGROOM. No one can be a slave, Zonula, who serves me. Come.

(*He kisses her. The music plays louder and louder. The spot light follows them as they pass up the stairs. The Virgins bow their heads, weeping.*)

CURTAIN

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